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Philippine Press Institute

The Impact of the Philippine Press Institute on News Media and Journalists - an assessment

by Carlos A. Arnaldo

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P H I L I P P I N E S

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THE IMPACT OF THE PHILIPPINE PRESS
INSTITUTE ON NEWS MEDIA AND
JOURNALISTS - AN ASSESSMENT

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Report prepared for the Government of
the Republic of the Philippines by
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Executive Summary

This report is an assessment of the project 501-PHI-61 Philippine Press Institute, as measured against the objectives it has set for itself in the project document prepared by its officers (annexed to the Plan of Operation). The report takes into consideration several historical factors which lend further insight into what the Institute was in its early days and what it is today. And finally, the report attempts to assess the impact that the Institute has had on the newspaper industry in general, as well as on working journalists. Aside from the official documents available on this project, the report has also made recourse to comprehensive discussions with several leaders in the Institute as well as with journalists and editors who have participated in PPI courses.

The Philippine Press Institute, from its revival in 1986 has made substantive progress, in many ways surpassing the achievements of the early Institute. Its impact on the provincial newspapers has been strongly felt, though there is much more to do in this regard, especially for those newspapers who have not yet become members of the Institute nor as yet felt its influence.

At the end of this project period, it is an opportune moment to consider reinforcing its logistics and outreach, so that in future it can continue on its own.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report is an evaluation of the project 501-PHI-61 Philippine Press Institute, as measured against the objectives it has set for itself in the project document prepared by its officers (annexed to the Plan of Operation). The report also takes into consideration several historical factors which lend further insight into what the Institute was in its early days and what it is today. And finally, the report attempts to assess the impact that the Institute has had on the newspaper industry in general, as well as on working journalists. Aside from the official documents available on this project, the report has also made recourse to comprehensive discussions with several leaders in the Institute as well as with journalists and editors who have participated in PPI courses. Had time permitted, a more thorough and quantitative investigation would certainly have been preferred and this should be foreseen in any future co-operative arrangements.

2. From these observations, the report will propose possible lines of action for the future for the Institute, for UNESCO and potential funds-in-trust donors.

Historical perspectives

3. To appreciate how well the Philippine Press Institute is faring today, as well as to measure its progress over the years, it is necessary to look again at its origins and attempt to gather, as much as possible, a long-term view. Only then are the achievements and weaknesses of the last six years shown in their proper perspective.

4. The Philippine Press Institute (PPI) was established in 1964 by the Asian Programme Committee of the International Press Institute. This was the same committee that set up the Press Foundation of Asia (PFA). While the Committee was indeed concerned with the larger goals and region-wide scope of the potential Press Foundation of Asia, some members were more immediately concerned with the immediate and practical output that a national press institute could provide.

5. The early Institute was then a pioneering effort by some members of the Asian Programme Committee, principally the editors and publishers of the major Manila dailies, to develop a strong journalist force in the country through intensive training programmes; these were buttressed by research and documentation.

6. In addition to its primary source of income (the contributions of the Manila dailies), the early Press Institute was assisted by a grant from Rockefeller Foundation plus rent-free space in the Ramon Magsaysay Building and a series of programme grants from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA); these were to be followed later by further assistance in ad hoc measures from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations International Childrens' Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO, as well as several aid agencies and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The early Institute was looked upon as the 'practical' arm of the PFA in the Philippines, as other institutes in Asia would be the same in their respective countries.

7. The initial generous funding and its Roxas Boulevard address gave the Institute a great measure of prestige and importance. The funds ensured that the programme of the PPI would be intensive, coherent and continuous -- at least during its early years. It soon became the major resource of many aid and donor agencies looking for information outputs and outreach systems.

8. In 1971, the Philippine Press Institute had encouraged and supported the formation of a sister organization, the Philippine Association of Broadcast Journalists, to extend its work for the up and coming journalists of the electronic media. A vast network of provincial newspapers, radio and television stations was just then beginning to emerge and become more active in carrying out the principles and ideals of the Institute.

9. The chief issues in the early days were the standards of the daily press, depth reporting, ethics of journalists, infringements on the liberty of the press through political pressures and sometimes brute force. The early Institute was well known for its editorials in the major papers concerning the unjust slaying of journalists, imprisonment of reporters, and various political or military pressures on individual writers and even newspapers themselves, provincially or locally.

10. Towards the end of its first era of existence in 1971, the Philippine press came under the increasingly heavy hand of government and the military. After the formal declaration of Martial Law by President Ferdinand B. Marcos in September 1972, the Philippine Press Institute decided voluntarily to close its offices. Whereas the Press Foundation continued to operate its regional programme from Manila, the journalists of the Press Institute found it impossible to struggle for freedom of the press in the Philippines when these very freedoms were jeopardized by the overruling martial law, often in direct violation of the written Constitution. In addition, all oppositionist newspapers were shut down, consequently shutting off all recourse to a free voice. Most of the remaining papers were overtly pro-government. There was at that time little if any scope for freedom of expression. To keep the Institute open and operational would have risked being identified with pro-government sentiments and losing all sense of objectivity. While the Philippine Association of Broadcasts Journalists remained in operation, with a 'snap' election of officers loyal to the new government, it lost all effect and respect in the profession and disappeared shortly afterwards.

11. When Corazon C. Aquino was elected President of the Republic in 1986, it was due in great part to the three million signatures petitioning her candidacy, a movement spearheaded by Joaquin 'Chino' Roces, publisher of the closed Manila Times, and one of the early pioneers who created the Philippine Press Institute. It was no surprise, then, that upon her election, Chino's next act was to re-open the Press Institute. Quarters were provided at token rental in historic Intramuros, at the gate of Puerta Isabela. A modest grant from the International Programme for the Development of Communication assisted the new Institute in setting up its office and working out its programme of training.

12. Chino received the news of the prospective Swiss funds-in-trust project, on his deathbed. He said to his new Directrice, Mrs Alice Villadolid, "Go ahead and form a mechanism for enforcing standards and ethics in the Philippine press. We can only do this if we have incentives to give the newsmen -- training workshops, books, a library." UNESCO and the Swiss funds, according to Mrs Villadolid, have made this possible.

13. The re-opening was a challenge. It was not merely a question of re-instating the old PPI, but of making it responsive to a new situation: a basically commercial press but now operating under newly restored freedoms; a drastic increase in the number of Manila papers (from 7 to 27) and an increase in the number of provincial papers (from less than a hundred to almost two hundred); but a proportionately stagnating circulation

of approximately two million (up from 1.5 million in 1972), despite a rapidly increasing population (from 48 million in 1972 to over 60 million today). Despite an extremely high literacy rate, newspaper circulation figures, while generally increasing slightly every year, have never really broken the statistical curve of some 4% of the population.

14. Of course, it must also be borne in mind, that these figures often belie the real readership. Manila papers may have as many as four to six readers of each copy. Provincial papers have up to ten or more, and many are read over the local radio stations to supplement their own news.

15. While the new quarters were historic, the Puerta Isabel gate of Intramuros, they were not practical -- no room for expansion of library or work rooms, seasonal inundation from floods. Salaried staff were minimal, a Director, an Associate Director and three support staff. Ad hoc consultants and clerical help were recruited for seminars and courses.

16. With regard to orientations, in addition to the original flash words of *standards*, *ethics*, *depth reporting* and *freedom of the press*, the new generation added the vocabulary of *ethnic reporting*, *new technology*, *computerization*, *page presentation* and *business management*. While the old Institute gravitated more towards problems of the national dailies, while not excluding the issues of the provincial papers, the new Institute has taken a strong and positive stance towards the provincial newspapers.

17. In this new environment, the revived Philippine Press Institute adopted an ambitious set of action objectives for 1989-1991:

development of training materials in science reporting, political analysis, cultural reporting, newspaper graphics, management, editing, women's writing and ethnic issues;

300 journalists to be trained in ten workshops on the above subjects;

400 journalists to participate in ten round-tables on ethics and the profession;

survey of markets and circulation audits for newspapers;

development of a PPI library;

linkages of PPI with other sectors of the community.

18. These short historical notes should serve as background to the assessment of the Institute's work and impact.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS

19. Based on the report¹ of the Philippine Press Institute 1989 to 1991, the following activities and accomplishments were described.

Training and Training Materials

20. During the period 1989 to 1991, UNESCO and Swiss funds-in-trust contributed directly to the organization of the following seminars, workshops and one round-table:

Improving the viability of rural newspapers,

Business and development writing (this course had two strategies, business reporting and improving the management of newspapers),

Reporting ethnic and regional issues (with reference to the peace and order situation in several provinces),

Reporting culture and lifestyle (2 seminars),

Political reporting and analysis (2 seminars, with focus on the 1992 elections),

Science reporting (2 seminars, with reference to the Pinatubo earthquake),

News cartoons (3 workshops in three different cities, with awardee cartoonist Antonio Antunes from Portugal),

Round-table on media practices (7 sessions, discussing the PPI code of ethics, concepts of an ombudsman and revival of a press council).

21. These courses provided professional training for 275 journalists of the working press plus attendance of some 180 at the round-tables. Other courses, seminar and round-tables were organized with funds from other sources. The total figure of all journalists trained by PPI from 1990-1991, irrespective of funding source, is 868. Quantitatively therefore, one can say that the Institute attained its training objective, and this, with a highly economical use of funds from all sources. It has easily equalled if not surpassed in quantity and spread, the training achievements of the early Institute.

¹ Final Report on the Journalists' Training Programme (UNESCO/Swiss Funds-in-Trust, 1989-1991); Manila: Philippine Press Institute, 1991.

22. The above seminars and courses have also led to the preparation of training modules in these fields, which can be used or adapted to the requirements of future seminars. These are supported in special cases by educational materials produced on video also provided by the project.

Publications

23. The Institute expanded its publication programme by issuing:

A Manual on Ethnic Reporting (based on papers of the seminar),

A Directory of Journalists in Continuing Education Programmes (prepared in view of eventual accreditation of journalists),

Philippine Cartoons (a follow-up activity of the three workshops),

Press Freedom and the Risk of Libel (based on discussions and papers of the seminar),

PPI Press Forum Quarterly (the journalists' journal reporting issues and problems raised at PPI seminars and round-tables).

Other objectives and activities

24. The Institute has been extremely concerned with the proposals for professionally audited newspaper circulation and consequent marketing strategies. Aside from the financial and technical difficulties in setting up a reliable auditing system, not all newspapers are in favour of this. Low figures, which are often the case of provincial newspapers, can readily reduce an advertiser's disposition to consider the newspaper outlet. There is also a great fear among these papers that once the audited circulation figures are announced, it will be extremely difficult for the weaker newspapers to break out of the deadlock and show more positive figures. These papers will then be stuck with their low figure and consequently reduced advertising. Further thought has to be given to the whole concept of audited figures and how such figures, when honestly reported, can really help the weaker newspapers.

25. Marketing concepts and strategies have been discussed in two seminars on the business management of newspapers. While some useful ideas have been adapted by some newspapers, the economic scene in the various provinces is so diverse, that further study and analysis needs to be devoted to this field. Solving the economic

problems of provincial newspapers, including and especially the salaries of journalists is an issue that oversteps the boundaries of one or two seminars. It would require, for a start, a profound analysis of the potential sources of income in each key province or newspaper coverage area; innovative strategies for tapping these resources; a few case experiments on which to base an overall strategy applicable to several newspapers. To advance further and increase the purchasing readership, further studies will have to be made of newspaper buying and reading habits and why despite high literacy and seeming increase of income over the years, newspaper circulation remains only at 4%.

26. Given the importance of these two related objectives, it would be beneficial to foresee a more detailed and explicit programme in these areas, but with the financial and expert resources required to accomplish a practical output for the provincial newspapers.

27. A library has been developed at the Institute; present holdings include 336 volumes on journalism history and practice, plus current issues of the Institute's 124 member newspapers. There is also a starting collection of 21 videotapes on various journalism, topics that may be viewed with the Institute's video facilities. As a library is a living organ and requires continuous feeding to keep it alive, holdings must be increased annually and with great prospection to current and future issues. New acquisitions should include basic references, books and references on specialized areas of reporting (science, environment, culture, political science) and recent reports.

28. After several years at the Puerta Isabel of Intramuros, the Philippine Press Institute has seriously taken steps towards identifying new accommodation. The most immediate concern is the annual floods that hinder accessibility to the site and threaten to ruin expensive equipment and books. The other reasons concern the need for additional space to expand the library and work rooms, and possibly to accommodate, within the same building, a new press club.

29. The present Manila Press Club has been undergoing a series of difficulties leading to financial hardship, increasing disinterest and loss of membership. The Institute, with the support of the major newspapers, has been discussing the proposal to organize a new Metro Manila Press Club whose memberships will be organized by guilds: editors, journalists, print technicians, photojournalists, cartoonists and so forth. A building in the same area in Intramuros has been selected with sufficient space for both the Institute and the Press Club. This would provide the Institute with the facility for receiving

journalists, researchers and students and hosting activities within their own premises, as in the early days.

30. In summary, the factual evidence shows a remarkable number of activities: journalists trained, publications and other services to journalists and newspapers. Above all it shows an efficient use of funds. The factual data, however, provide little insight into the impact of the Institute's work on individual journalists and newspapers. The next section will seek to illustrate this impact with examples drawn from discussions with selected Trustees of the Institute and participants in various seminars.

III. OBSERVATIONS

31. The following observations are based on discussions with selected Trustees of the Institute, some of them veteran journalists and pioneers in the building of the early Press Institute and several of today's newspapers. These were supplemented by discussions with participants of various PPI seminars. This section takes into account the historical notes of the Introduction and arrives at an overall assessment.

A permanent co-ordinating mechanism

32. The first observation stems from an understanding of how institutions are created, built up and sustained over the long term. It relates to the permanence of institutions.

33. While grants from several aid agencies and foundations since 1986 helped PPI re-establish its footing, UNESCO/IPDC and Swiss funds-in-trust were particularly helpful in building up the basic infrastructure: training aids, office vehicle, publication funds and the whole operation of programming intensive training courses. In effect, the flexibility in the use of these funds was greatly instrumental in the *core* work of the Institute, whereas other agencies supported mainly ad hoc courses.

34. In turn, this core work has poised the Institute to co-operate with several NGOs and their specialists, among them Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Confederation of ASEAN Journalists, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Conference on Environment, International Press Institute, Press Foundation of Asia, the Asian Institute of Business Management, the University

of the Philippines, the Philippine Cultural Centre, the Forum of Asean Environmental Journalists, the National Press Club, People in Communications, the UNESCO Tambuli Community Radio project. The new PPI has thus developed a dynamic network of co-operating institutions, the basis of much of its outreach and long-term impact. It is in a strong position for outreach work.

Leadership

35. Editors and publishers of the Manila dailies, many of whom are Trustees of the Institute, take their responsibilities seriously and actively. In sharing their philosophies, ideas and strategies with provincial newspapers, they are looked up to as leaders in the newspaper industry. *Business World*, for example, contributed significantly to the introduction of desktop publishing (and training in this field), and to marketing strategies to help provincial newspapers tap more advertising revenue. One provincial paper, at their suggestion, even hired their own advertising account executive and was able to increase revenue to build the paper from 6 pages to 12, stretching up to 30 for special issues. Many of the Trustees serve as seminar co-ordinators and lecturers.

36. The publisher of the *Chronicle* has led the way in the participation of newspapers, national and provincial, in the Media Citizens' Quick Count, the non-government endeavor to assist in the counting of ballots for the May national elections. The new electoral code forbids election advertising in any of the media; on the other hand, all media are urged to present all the candidates and their profiles as equitably as possible. Newspapers, through their reporters and stringers, will also assist at the counting of the ballots, the reporting of the count, and the computer compilation for the overall national count. This is extremely important, as the new electoral code has eliminated the usual election inspectors of the two major parties; there will now be only three inspectors, all of them neutral school teachers, none formally representing any political party. Media, including newspapers, have been looked to as the one objective partner in the national election count.

37. It must also be borne in mind, however, that a number of the smaller newspapers begrudge the loss of election advertising, since for many, this would have been a major source of additional income. Most, if not all, have pledged, nonetheless, to respect the new election code and support the Institute's involvement in the Media Citizens' Quick Count.

38. The Institute wrote a Code of Ethics in 1988. Several local press clubs when swearing in their new officers, request them to recite this code publicly. Although not yet formally adopted by all journalists and newspapers, it has been cited by several reporters as a strong social deterrent to accepting bribes or 'paid' stories, and other forms of dishonest reporting or unethical practices.

Practical target: not growth, but stabilization

39. Despite the high literacy rate in the Philippines, well over 90%, newspaper circulation has remained *proportionately* the same for the last 25 years. It peaks today at 2 million, or less than 4% of the national population. Many have pointed to a brittle economy especially at the middle and lower levels of income. For these people, buying a newspaper at 2 to 5 pesos a copy, daily or weekly imposes a financial burden, a luxury easily replaced by radio or television. It can be safely said that the 2 million purchasers of newspapers are mainly the middle- to upper-income professionals in Manila and key cities.

40. What is critical for many newspapers, is not to seek higher circulation (which is felt to be impossible under the present economic conditions), but to avoid sliding backwards into lower circulation. At the same time, in order to maintain this purchasing readership, the newspapers must continually strive to improve presentation and news quality, while striving to increase advertising income. The practical goal for these newspapers, therefore, is not higher circulation, but more printed pages and improved presentation; in a word, not just more copies, but better copy.

41. These goals have been kept at the head of all PPI training schedules. And a number of provincial newspapers have improved layouts, increased photo space, and printed more feature articles and occasional supplements or special issues. Their editors claim that much of this improvement was due to training provided by PPI seminars on business management of newspapers, editorial and layout work, feature and depth reporting. One course on business management of newspapers, organized in co-operation with the Asian Institute of Business Management, was particularly cited for its relevance to this issue; it was also the most expensive course of the Institute, but from the results, well worth the cost. In addition, PPI was instrumental in facilitating contacts for the purchase of printing machines, accessories and other tools of the trade.

42. Provincial reporters also referred to improvements in evaluating news, writing, quality, thematic and sectoral news (agriculture, women's and children's issues). Some reporters pointed in particular to tendencies of several journalists to develop an independent, objective stance -- sometimes even in conflict with that of their own publishers (during Martial Law, a number have been detained in prison for this position); and to the impact of ethics in the profession. A number of reporters who have taken PPI courses, no longer accept 'envelopes' after press conferences and this has begun to have a positive effect on other reporters.

43. In Leyte and Samar, the sister newspapers, the *Reporter* and the *Samar Reporter* presented comprehensive coverage, both stories and photos of the catastrophic floods last year. In many ways their coverage was more complete and more detailed than that found in many of the Manila dailies. Several years ago, the two papers gave comprehensive coverage, with great risk to themselves, to the murder of Dr Bobby de la Paz who was accused by the military of giving medical assistance to members of the National People's Army and related insurgent groups.

The press as negotiator

44. In a few cases, some journalists through their wide and varied contacts have also become negotiators or middle men for peace talks. In northern Luzon, the Cordillera News Agency, for example, has contacted various oppositional elements to discuss peace terms with the Government representatives over disputed tribal lands, logging and dam construction. Similar examples of reporters or newspapers can be cited for several regions of the country.

Outreach or 'graduating' to Manila?

45. One of the inevitable implications of improving provincial journalism is that the better trained journalists are often tempted to migrate to Manila for higher salaries. No figures are currently available on this. On the other hand, a number have opted to stay with their provincial paper.

46. In Ilocos, a provincial reporter has set up a local training group called the Independent Media Circle. The group meets regularly to discuss basic issues, such as topical news, ethical values and credibility. Members of this same group also adopted a high school newspaper, and trained their reporters in environment issues, science and local reporting. The high school paper improved so much that it gained almost as high a circulation as the provincial newspaper and treated a number of issues considered too delicate for the commercial paper. One of their reporters, together with the Deputy Director of PPI, assisted the UNESCO Tambuli Community Radio project in the training of personnel to set up newsrooms in Batanes and Laurel (Batangas).

47. In the southern island regions of Visayas and Mindanao, twelve major newspapers have joined together in a news exchange project, sharing major copy freely among each other. This has served to improve the new output of the twelve newspapers, as well as forge a greater sense of regional unity among the readers.

48. After the PPI seminar on political reporting, the Manila-based newspaper, *Malaya*, organized the same course for its own staff, requesting PPI for the seminar papers.

49. These are but a few examples, but they illustrate how the work of the Institute can be carried on through its members, both newspapers and individual journalists, as well as by networking with other organizations.

Orientation to the provincial press

50. The above examples also highlight the positive and dynamic orientation of the Institute to assist the provincial newspapers, particularly in marketing, economic sustenance, quality reporting, page presentation, and generally uplifted journalism standards. It can almost be said that the most important and long lasting impact of the Institute has been on the provincial press. The critical break-point, that of circulation, is one that has to be tackled more thoroughly and perhaps with solutions beyond seminars and formal training.

IV NEW ORIENTATIONS

51. The review of the factual achievements of the Philippine Press Institute, supported by the in-depth discussions leading to further insights into its impact on journalists and newspapers leads to confirmation of the Institute in its orientation towards serving the Manila dailies but with a special focus on the provincial newspapers. This confirmation can now be expressed more explicitly in operational terms.

Long-term objective

52. For its future work, the overall objective is the increase in circulation and quality of newspapers, both national and provincial through reinforced marketing strategies, improved page presentation and in-depth news reporting.

Immediate Objectives

53. Specifically, the Institute seeks to attain this objective through a comprehensive programme of training which includes publication of major journalism references and handbooks, regional training centres, reinforcement of the facilities of the Institute and contribution of the Institute and the major newspapers to the formation of a new press club.

Activities

DTP Training

54. Reinforcement of training in desktop publishing, particularly for provincial newspapers. This will be done by setting up DTP training facilities in suitable press centres or journalism departments of universities in northern Luzon (Ilocos or Baguio), Visayas (Cebu or Iloilo) and Mindanao (Cagayan de Oro, Davao or Zamboanga), as well as at PPI. Four workshops will be organized in these regions.

Photojournalism

55. Three workshops on photojournalism will be organized in selected regions. In addition to sessions on technical and artistic photo work, discussions will focus on

current issues, in particular the marketing of black and white photographic materials in the near future, the relevance and practicality of electronic photography and photo transmission. Each workshop will make its contribution to the launching of an annual Photojournalism yearbook, to be eventually continued by the National Association of News Photographers.

News cartoons

56. Three workshops on newspaper cartoons will be organized in selected regions, and the launching of an annual *News Cartoon Yearbook* to be eventually continued and supported by the *Samahan ng mga Kartunista*.

Investigative reporting

57. Two workshops on investigative reporting will be organized. Support will be provided for the publication of a series of investigative reports, with circulation to major newspapers of the region.

Marketing strategies

58. Research will be undertaken on potential marketing strategies for provincial newspapers and a pilot experiment set up with two newspapers to determine realistic and practical ways of generating income in provincial areas and increasing the purchase of newspapers.

Enhanced Institute facilities

59. Funds will be provided for renovation of the new PPI quarters, to allow for expanded workspace for library, reading and consulting room, DTP workrooms, conference room, and the facilities for the press club.

60. An evaluation is foreseen towards the last six months of the project.

Budget estimation

61. An estimated budget is proposed for a two-year period, as follows:

Consultant for evaluation	8,000
Official travel	5,500
Contracts for courses and workshops	80,000
Contracts for publication	20,000
Contracts for market and investigative research	30,000
Equipment for DTP	36,000
Equipment for Photojournalism	10,000
Operating expenses	10,000
Facilities renovation	15,000
	<hr/>
Project total (without overhead cost account)	US\$ 181,500

Conclusion

62. The Philippine Press Institute, from its revival in 1986 has made substantive progress, in many ways surpassing the achievements of the early Institute. Its impact on the provincial newspapers has been strongly felt, though there is much more to do in this regard, especially for those newspapers who have not yet become members of the Institute nor as yet felt its influence.

63. At the end of this project period, it is an opportune moment to consider reinforcing its logistics and outreach, so that in future it can continue on its own.