



Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum

NEWSLETTER

August, 2020

EDITORIAL COLUMN

As per the recent developments in the political environment in the country, the Parliamentary Election was held on 5th August 2020, after a postponement of the election at least twice, due to a surge in Covid -19 cases. Having been bestowed power upon the formation of a 2/3 majority government, there is much hope and expectations among masses for positive and drastic changes to take place within all sectors in the country. Against this backdrop, the need for democracy, freedom of expression, media empowerment, etc., are being debated and much discussed in various platforms. As an organization that works towards

fostering vibrant democracy and for being a voice for the excluded and marginalized communities, the role and intervention of Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF), is crucial at this juncture. Having shed light upon the everyday struggles of the farmers; the mundane yet disregarded problems of daily wage earners; plight of the fishing communities; issues encountered by women, LGBTIQ and the differently abled communities, there is much more that remains to be done.

Equity and inclusion of all communities are mandatory in accomplishing positive outcomes in any socio-political context.

“Development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement, including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities for the majority of people through their gaining greater control over their environment.”

(Everett Rogers, 1976)

SDJF is aiming at accomplishing these milestones through its ongoing projects and interventions as summarized below.

BRIEF UPDATE OF OUR CURRENT PROJECTS

MEDIA EMPOWERMENT FOR A DEMOCRATIC SRI LANKA (MEND) PROGRAM

The Media Empowerment for a Democratic Sri Lanka (MEND) program is an intervention to support and facilitate media transformation that can empower Sri Lanka's democratic values and right to information of citizens.

VIBRANT VOICES (VV)

The Vibrant Voices is a project designed to build capacities and video storytelling skills of organizations working on issues of the marginalized, such as women, LGBTIQ+ and differently abled communities to raise their voices and to advocate for equality and justice. SDJF has trained 39 women representatives from 13 organizations across the country in 2018 & 2019, and facilitated the production of 78 stories broadly on gender equality by using their smartphones. In the current year (2020), SDJF is in the process of organizing this program. It is planning to select eight organizations with 24 participants to take part in the program. They will undergo an intensive five-day training with on-site mentorship for story production and social media mentoring aimed at producing 48 multimedia stories on the issues affecting women and other marginalized groups.



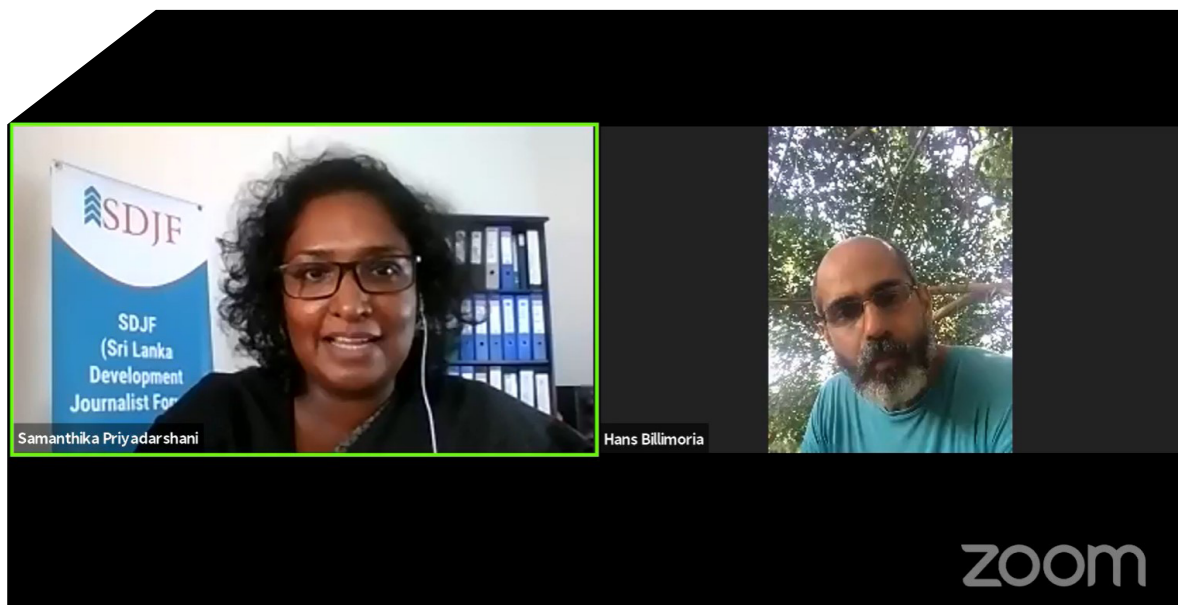
MEDIA GENDER CHARTER (MGC) FOR SRI LANKA

The Media Gender Charter (MGC) is expected to act as a guiding instrument to support the achievement of gender equality in the media landscape of Sri Lanka. It gives a broader focus on: gender sensitive reporting, inclusivity and equality; working environment in media; sexual harassment in the workplace and, guidelines for its implementation.

Based on a series of national and regional consultations, facilitated by SDJF, with media and gender experts, editors, senior journalists, civil society organizations, finalizing of the Gender Charter is on cards. In addition to the Charter, a user-friendly reference on 'checklist and guidelines for media institutions' has been developed with the help from an international gender consultant.

As a novel approach, SDJF has planned a series of monthly Facebook live discussions, #Media4Everyone with media and gender experts in the field. The key objective of this program is to raise awareness among the public on gender inclusivity in the media sphere, thereby creating a discourse on the importance of having a Media

Gender Charter. The first discussion, 'What do you know about gender inclusion in Sri Lankan media?' was successfully concluded on August 19, 2020 and interestingly, interactive dialogue was initiated through Facebook, among the public, interested on the topic (22,761 reach, 964 engagements, 22 comments, 11000 views & 15 watch parties). With the dire need of bringing this topic to the general public, SDJF conducted 'Vox Pop' interviews among the public, representing different districts, for their views on gender equality in the media. Currently SDJF focuses on the launch of the MGC inviting highly influential individuals, media organizations, media owners, and academia. In the long run, SDJF plans to establish a gender secretariat to facilitate the media institutions for the purpose of maintaining standards of gender sensitive reporting and to receive complaints from the public on the subject.



Link; <https://www.facebook.com/LDJF.org/videos/357191845311032/>

MEDIACORPS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM



MediaCorps Fellowship Program is aimed at capacitating young journalists on collaborative multimedia storytelling as a tool to promote peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. It connects journalists hailing from diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds while providing them with an opportunity to explore the cultures of others, their communities and their struggles in life through an interactive seven-day field visit. The program also trains the journalists on a wide range of themes from conflict and gender sensitive reporting, data journalism and social media journalism, and offers

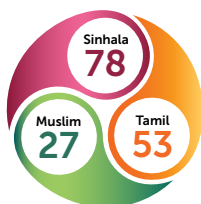
them a deep perspective of issues in other communities, in making them unbiased, objective and ethical journalists. In 2019, given the immense success of the program it was extended to university students following mass media, communication and journalism related courses. Since its inception in 2018, the Fellowship has benefitted over 150 Fellows who have produced more than 300 mobile and multimedia stories. This includes 25 undergraduates from University of Sri Jayawardenapura, University of Jaffna and Eastern University.



MediaCorps

158  **FELLOWS**

316  **MoJo STORIES**



During the Covid-19 pandemic period, a special news magazine program was launched under the Fellowship as MediaCorps Watch to report ground level human-interest stories on the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. MediaCorps Watch is now in its Phase 3, having completed around 100 magazines in Sinhala and Tamil and several success stories.

In August 2020, under the third intake of the MediaCorps Fellowship, a fresh team of 21 Fellows were trained. The team comprised of 13 males and 8 females including 10 Sinhalese, 5 Tamil and 6 Muslim Fellows. The training started off with an inauguration ceremony with the participation of Ms. Jean Mackenzie, Chief of Party IREX and other representatives from IREX and SDJF where Fellows received a Mojo toolkit including a smartphone. The training also included a field visit based on which they produced their first complete Mojo story.



(Link; <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/IUuYbWqOL-jTXiOiMMf7Icr0xRY3p53C>)



INCUBATOR SPACES FOR PROMOTING INFORMATION RIGHT & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION (InSPIRE)

InSPIRE strives to promote an increased understanding of freedom of expression and information, through the establishment of Incubator Spaces in the selected three Universities in Colombo, Kandy, and Jaffna Districts. This action will empower a community of aspiring future media professionals by providing multi-disciplinary learning and capacity building to creatively express and advocate for the focus areas of gender-sensitive freedom of expression and ethical and socially responsible media expression.

The InSPIRE team paid a visit to the University of Jaffna to donate PP equipment and had a discussion with the university authorities on signing the MoU. As a major initiative of the project, the team with its management explored options in selecting a suitable location in order to build the proposed incubator space. This space would enable students to generate quality media products, which would contribute to the enhancement of democracy and human rights in Sri Lanka. The project team is now in the process of preparing a gap analysis of the existing university curriculums which has now been entrusted to Dr. Pavithra Jayawardena the consultant. In furtherance of this, SDJF called for applications to recruit three Liaison Officers to help execute the field level activities of the selected universities.



REAL MEDIA LITERACY FOR FAKE NEWS WORLD - NEWSEUMED

In March 2020, SDJF and the Center for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL), in collaboration with NewseumED and American Corner conducted six workshops in Colombo and Kandy to raise awareness on fake news and media literacy. This workshop was targeted at three different community groups such as youth and students, civil society & community leaders and journalists, and there were more than 300 participants. An accomplished outreach educator of NewseumED, Ms. Jessi Hollis McCarthy conducted the sessions under three modules such as media ethics, identifying fake news with the tools called “ESCAPE” and, the fake news propaganda tool, “SEED”.

Following those workshops that were held in the months of July and August, three webinars were conducted for the same groups to widen their knowledge on fake news and misinformation namely; Fighting fake news, Detecting propaganda in defeating emotional manipulation and Who’s afraid of fake news, on 25th of July, 29th of July and 13th of August, respectively.

“ESCAPE”

Evidence
Source
Context
Audience
Purpose
Execution

“SEED”

Simplification
Exploitation
Exaggeration
Division



AMERICAN CORNER GRANTS PROGRAM

We have been managing American Corner activities of Kandy (main hub), Jaffna and Matara as per the schedules agreed upon between American Embassy and the respective centers in the current year (2020), which is coming to end by December. Participated on a conference call on 6th August, involving Inoshi Ratnasekera & Nowshad Jabbar from US Embassy and Prof Balasuriya & Asjain Wahid from SDJF, to discuss progress of activities in 2020. SDJF was requested to submit by 24th August, the proposal and the budget for the coming year (2021).

Creating Resilient Women in Governance Process through Critical Communication Skills

Women Lead is a pilot program, which is designed to enhance the leadership qualities and critical media, and communication skills of selected Local Government Women Members (LGWM) in the Northern Province, to give them hands on experience and skills to active members in the local government and to act as real voice for voiceless in the council and contribute actively to the governing process. This program was initiated by Sri Lanka Development Journalists Forum (SDJF), in collaboration with the Centre for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL).

Under this project, SDJF is expecting to improve the LGWM skills on 6 identified domains;

1. Understanding propaganda of media.
2. Understanding the media landscape and journalist structure.
3. Critical media consumption and media literacy.
4. Communication and leadership skills.
5. Understanding social media and technology.

Legal framework on Local government through a series of workshops, field trips, mock sessions, mentoring and exposures. This project was funded by Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust (NTT).



MEDIACORPS FELLOW OF THE MONTH



AHSAN AFTHAR

“I finally found a space to raise my voice against gender-based discrimination, gender stereotyping and many other issues. I believe that the public should essentially be informed of these topics and fight against them”,
- Ahsan Afthar

Ahsan Afthar joined the MediaCorps Fellowship program last February. When he joined the Fellowship as an amateur journalist, he had no previous experience in Mobile Storytelling nor in any other concepts and ethics on journalism. For him the training program was an experience that turned his life around for better. He was particularly interested in the session, Gender Sensitive Journalism conducted by Dharini Priscilla, Tamil Editor of Bakamoono.lk. After the session Ahsan asked Dharini if he could publish his articles in Bakamoono.lk, since no other mainstream media platform would publish his articles on critical gender related issues in the country.

Dharini also speaks of Ahsan,

“I’m so glad that he came to me that day, after the session and asked if he could write. I’m also grateful that being a man he speaks of issues of women and other gender minorities with sensitivity and understanding. As a young journalist his writings are very polished and convincing, that makes me sometimes wonder where he has been all this time!”

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Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) is a non-governmental organization that promotes democracy, rule of law, governance, peace and reconciliation, gender equality and justice through creative media products, training, research and advocacy, across the country. For more information please visit us www.ldjf.org and follow us:



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