

Project Annual Report Year Two

# Improving Qualitative Journalism in Bangladesh

Report prepared by



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## Background:

Bangladesh media is growing geometrically. There are 26 television channels and 189 national newspapers. Newsrooms are mostly filled with fresh low cost reporters without proper training and there is lack of quality leaders and mentors, as most of the managers have been promoted to these posts well before they should, to meet the bunch of new needs.

In the wake of the growth of media in recent years, it is strongly felt that proper interventions are needed for the journalists to enhance their ability to identify, produce and finally publish high quality in-depth reports on areas of public interest. Issues like safety and security of journalist, conflict between media owners and other stakeholders, political and business conflicts also need to be addressed.

In this context of landscape and scenario of media, Fojo-MRDI project ‘Improving Qualitative Journalism in Bangladesh’ has been taken to improve the quality of reporting, particularly the depth and reliability of qualitative journalism upto a desired standard.

## Objective and outcomes:

The project is based on the following objectives to reach the intermediate outcomes:

### *Overall objective*

Contribute to improving the conditions for people to raise themselves out of poverty, strengthening democracy, respect for human rights and gender equality, and to contribute to sustainable development.

### *Specific objective*

Media in Bangladesh contributes to strengthened democracy and gender equality, greater respect for human rights and freedom from oppression.

### *Intermediate Outcome*

Targeted media houses and news providers publish qualitative investigative journalism, particularly on themes related to gender equality, labour rights, corruption and environmental impact and climate change.

#### *Immediate outcome 1:*

Targeted media houses and news providers identify, research and produce high quality investigative journalism, particularly on gender equality, labour rights, corruption and environmental impact and climate change.

#### *Immediate outcome 2:*

Targeted partners in the media sector collaborate to create a conducive environment for investigative journalism, particularly on gender equality, labour rights, corruption and environmental impact and climate change.

Duration of year two was September 2017 - August 2018.

## Activities performed in Year 2:

Year two of the project performed a number of advocacy and capacity building activities focused on improving the situation of quality reporting and enhancing internal capacity building of media houses.

**Activity-1: Workshop on RTI for Investigative Journalism:** To share the scope and challenges of using RTI Act in producing investigative reports with Bangladeshi media gatekeepers, one half-daylong seminar on ‘Use of RTI Act in Investigative Journalism’ was held on 27 September 2017 at Azimur Rahman Conference Hall, The Daily Star, Dhaka.

Professor Dr. Md. Golam Rahman, Chief Information Commissioner, Information Commission Bangladesh was present as the chief guest. Golam Sarwar, President, Editor’s Council & Editor, Daily Samakal attended the seminar as special guest.



Saikat Datta, South Asia Editor, Asia Times from India and Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, President, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists and Editor-in-chief & CEO, ETV made the presentations in the context of their respective countries. Editors, gatekeepers, journalists, former government officials, academics, and CSO representatives from Dhaka and outside Dhaka participated in the discussion. Syed Ishtiaque Reza, Director, News and Current Affairs, Ekattor TV moderated the seminar. Existing challenges of using RTI act emerged by experience sharing. The seminar also pointed out possible way forward to overcome the present situation.

### Activity-2: Media Monitoring

A number of reports are yet to publish/on-air under mentorship and Investigative Journalism Partnership programme of the project.

To assess the qualitative and quantitative aspect of reports published over Bangladeshi media, project started archiving mainstream Newspapers and primetime news of TV channels.

This archive will be used during evaluation stage.

Sl. No	Print Media	TV Media
1.	Prothom Alo	BTV
2.	Ittefaq	ATN Bangla
3.	Samakal	NTV
4.	Kalerkantha	Ekattor TV
5.	Naya Diganta	Independent TV
6.	Janakantha	Somoy TV
7.	Jugantor	Channel-i
8.	Daily Star	News24
9.	News Age	Maasranga Television
10.	Independent	Jamuna TV
11.	Financial Express	Bangla Vision
12.	Dhaka Tribune	
13.	Daily Gramer Kagoj	

### Activity-3: Investigative Journalism Partnership (Fist & second call)

MRDI signed agreement with eight media houses under Investigative Journalism Partnership first call. Partnered media houses have been provided all types of supports mentioned in their agreement. MRDI arranged experts from local and international according to their need. They have published/on aired nineteen stories so far. Few more reports will be published.

Under second call of the partnership, agreements have been signed with three media houses.

### Activity-4: Investigative Journalism Partnership Launching Ceremony

Like first year, second call of investigative journalism partnership for the media houses and freelance journalist groups has been announced through a formal ceremony. On 1 February 2018 it was held at Azimur Rahman Conference Hall, The Daily Star, Dhaka. Twenty-five participants including advisor news, executive editor, head of news, chief news editor, planning editor, news editor, chief reporter, staff reporter, senior Reporter, special correspondent from fifteen media houses attend the programme.



It mainly focused process of application and selection. The framework of partnership and nature of supports that can be provided by the project discussed in detail.

Two journalists who worked under first call shared their experiences.

### Activity-5: Trainee programme for potential future editor-in-chiefs and media managers

Strengthening skills and knowledge of promising mid-level professionals to become future editors, newsroom managers and media managers, in-house trainings were organized with The Daily Star and Daily Prothom Alo. 47 participants from both houses participated in the training and learned newsroom management and leadership techniques.



Two international experts Irina Halling, Media Consultant & Leadership trainer and Bob Eggington, Freelance journalist, trainer, management consultant & entrepreneur conducted the training.

**Activity-6: Safety programmes and training**

In-house training on safety and security were organized with the Daily Ittefaq and News24. Twenty-five participants including staff reporter, senior Reporter, district correspondent, photographers, newsroom Editor and senior camera persons from two houses received the training.



Major AKM Shakil Newaz, Director(Operation & Maintenance), Fire Service & Civil Defence Directorate; Md. Akram Hossain, Assistant Director (Development), Fire Service & Civil Defence Directorate; Muhammad Sanwar Hossain BPM, PPM (bar), Additional Deputy



Commissioner Special Action Group, CTTC, Dhaka Metropolitan Police; Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Editor-in-chief & CEO, Ekushey TV; Mohammad Shahadat Hossain, Chief Security Consultant, The Information Security Agent Limited; Shahriar Karim, Journalist & News Analyst conducted the sessions.

Two half-day long training programmes created awareness on the issue among the participants and introduced some common safety mechanism for doing investigative journalism.

**Activity-7: Safety and Security Training for selected IJ partners**

Training on safety and security was organized for the journalists working in media houses under first and second investigative journalism partnership call to facilitate partner media houses in successful implementation of their proposed project plan.



Thirty-four journalists took part in two batches. Training held in residential manner. Two international experts Tamara Bralo and Paul Kenyon conducted the training. Shakhawat Liton, Planning Editor, The Daily Star; Sanaul Haq, Chief Reporter, ATN Bangla and Udisa Islam, Chief Reporter, Bangla also conducted sessions as local experts.



#### **Activity-8: Sharing launch with editors/newsroom staffs**

One lunch meeting was organized with editors/newsroom staffs of partner media houses under first call. Objective of the meeting was to know experience of media houses in working on their proposed stories. Participants shared their views on how this initiative is contributing in enhancing internal capacity of the media houses. They also mentioned some challenges they are facing.

#### **Activity-9: Two-day training for MRDI staff and Coordinators on Safety and Security Activities**

Initially this activity was designed for Two-day training where all staffs of MRDI and its divisional & district coordinators would be present. But later the programme was changed. Training part of MRDI staffs has been dropped and one network meeting with editors of local newspapers was organized.

It was held on 12 July 2018 at the Conference room, Hotel La Vinci, Dhaka. Its aim was to extend the scope of investigative reporting at the local level and developing a countrywide safety network. The network will play the key role in disseminating issue related knowledge and create awareness at their periphery. Nine editors around the country participated in the meeting.



The meeting highlighted existing safety and security situation at the local level. Absence of appropriate knowledge on the issue and limited resources & opportunities were identified

which create barrier to improve the state of affairs. Considering the importance of the issue, participants agreed to be part of the safety network.

#### **Activity-10: Development of safety and security guideline**

Developing safety and security guideline for journalist was a significant activity of this year. Though safety and security is one of the prime areas of concern for the journalists, there is lack of reference materials on the issue. Media houses follows some safety measures but they don't have any written guideline.

MRDI formed a four member journalist team to develop a guideline on safety and security for journalists. Team members were oriented on the issue by an international expert and introduced with standard international practices and experiences. Contents of the guideline were developed through a meeting in presence of experts working on physical safety, digital safety and legal issues.

Team members sat for several times to discuss the update of guidebook development. Literature review was done and interviews of experienced journalists were taken to know the real life risk situation. Draft guideline was presented in a meeting with the media gatekeepers for getting their valuable inputs and further feedbacks on the guidebook.



Incorporating all feedbacks, the guidebook has been finalized. And now it is under designing & printing process.

#### **Activity-11: Promotional video**

One promotional film is being developed under this project for partner/potential partner media houses, NGOs, national/international experts and collaborative partners to show how the project is contributing to the improvement of the quality of journalism in Bangladesh.

The film mainly focused on how investigative journalism partnership of the project is bringing positive result for betterment of qualitative journalism. It also covered status of investigative journalism in Bangladesh, safety aspects, competitive environment and international collaborations.

Editors, newsroom managers, international and local expert, project staff have been interviewed for this film. The video is in the process of editing.



### Activity-12: Journalist mentorship programme on one thematic issue

The project has four thematic areas to be covered and in each project year, one mentorship programme will be announced on one thematic issue. This year it was for 'Gender'. Targeted audience of the programme are young promising journalists. But independent news providers were also encouraged to apply. MRDI announced the mentorship through its official website and email circulation.

Based on the submitted proposal thirteen journalists were selected for the mentorship. Among them ten continued and published their stories. During the four-month mentorship programme, participants attended two three-day long intensive training sessions.



Qurratul-Ain-Tahmina, Advisor News of Prothom Alo and Stella Paul, Investigative Journalist of India were the mentors. Participants worked under direct supervision of mentors and increased their reporting skills and knowledge about quality journalism. This programme tried to focus gender from different reporting angles. Knowledge and techniques used in the mentorship programme will sustain and will enable the participants to improve their reporting quality. Nine reports along with series reports have been published/ aired under this programme.

### Activity-13: Journalist field trip under mentorship programme

As per proposed story ideas, three mentees visited Bhola, Cox's Bazar and Barguna to collect information and taking interviews. The project bears all cost of field trips and local conveyance of participants under the mentorship programme required for their stories.

### Activity-14: Regional dialogue with editors' council

Safety and security of journalists mean physical security besides their legal and virtual safety. These are vast issues that warrant the involvement of different stakeholders. MRDI in

partnership with Editors’ Council organized Regional Dialogue: Safety and Security for Journalist on 12 July 2019 at Auditorium, BRAC Centre Inn, Dhaka.

Reazuddin Ahmed, veteran journalist, editor, union leader and member of the Editors’ Council chaired and moderated the programme. From Sri Lanka Ranga Kalansooriya, Regional Advisor for Asia, International Media Support, Denmark; from India Rana Ayyub, Investigative journalist and writer and from UK Lucy Freeman, Chief Executive of Media Legal Defense Initiative



participated in the dialogue as special discussants. From Bangladesh owners and editors of national and local newspapers, online and TV, journalist union leaders, academics and civil society representatives also took part in the dialogue.

The participants agreed that the guideline of journalists’ safety protocol should be a product of a joint exercise including all quarters concerned, including the Editors’ Council, Newspaper Owners’ Association, Press Institute of Bangladesh, journalists’ unions, National Press Club, the Dhaka Reporters Unity and such other bodies.

**Activity-15: Capacity building for journalist association and government officers**



MRDI signed two agreements with Television Camera Journalist Association (TCA). Sixty members of the association participated in the training on safety and security for journalist in two batches during the month of May-June.

Training covers basics of safety and security, hostile environment management, safety and security in disasters, digital security, safety-security in high risk assignments



Md. Akram Hossain, Assistant Director (Development), Fire Service & Civil Defence Directorate; Muhammad Sanwar Hossain BPM, PPM (bar), Additional Deputy Commissioner,



Special Action Group, CTTC, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and Sanaul Haq, Chief Reporter, ATN Bangla took sessions in the training.

Another agreement was signed with Reporters Against Corruption to organize a training on investigating corruption for their members. Two day long training was held on 13-14 August 2018 at AS Mahamud Seminar Hall, The Daily Star, Dhaka. Twenty-four members of the association working in different media houses as reporter, staff reporter, crime In-charge, senior reporter/correspondent, special correspondent, news editor participated in the training.

Sessions were conducted on understanding investigative journalism, stages of investigation, ethics in investigative journalism, sourcing, corruption in procurement, storytelling and bullet-proofing, how ACC investigates, addressing legal and ethical issues and RTI in investigative journalism.



Shish Haider Chowdhury, Director, CPTU; Mir Md. Zainul Abedin Shebly, Director, ACC; Golam Shariar Chowdhury, Deputy Director, ACC; SaifulAlam Chowdhury, Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, University of Dhaka and Zayedul Ahsan Pintu, Editor, DBC News were present as resource persons in different sessions of the training.

#### Activity-16: **Developing social media guideline for MRDI**

One social media guideline was developed. Initially the plan was one consultant will be hired for developing the guideline. But later it was developed by the organization team members. And budget under this head remains unspent.

#### Activity-17: Thematic seminar with policy makers



To create a greater gender sensitivity among Bangladeshi Media in using languages or portrayal of cases in news stories, a seminar on 'Gender in Journalism: In pursuit of Quality content and Sensitivity' was held on 24 January 2018 at Azimur Rahman Conference Hall, The Daily Star, Dhaka.

Key presentation on Sensitivity and quality of content in gender related reporting in Bangladesh Media was presented by Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, Department of Mass



Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University. Agneta Söderberg Jacobsson Gender Advisor from Fojo Media Institute, Linnaeus University, Sweden also given a separate presentation on Better business with gender diversity. Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, President, BFUJ and Editor-in-Chief & CEO, ETV moderated the seminar. Editors, gatekeepers of national and local media and member of civil society organizations participated in the discussion.

### **Activity-18: ToT for PIB Trainers**



Three-day long training of trainer was organized in partnership with Press Institute of Bangladesh. Fourteen trainers of PIB from both Dhaka and outside Dhaka selected by PIB authority participated in the training.

Training covered Safety and Security of Journalists: The Importance, Safety-Security in High Risk Assignments, Safety Plan in a High Risk Assignment, Digital Security, Risk Assessment, Assess Risk and Develop a Mitigation Plan (Based on given story ideas), Legal Security, Learning through Senses: Relative Effectiveness of Various Aids/Materials, Making PowerPoint Slides and Qualities of an Effective Trainer.



Muhammad Sanwar Hossain BPM, PPM (bar), Additional Deputy Commissioner, Dhaka Metropolitan Police; Sanaul Haq, Chief Reporter, ATN Bangla and Zahid Newaz Khan, Chief News Editor, Channel-i conducted different sessions.

Lecture, question & answer, multimedia presentation and group exercise methodologies were applied in conducting the training. At the end of the training, certificate was awarded to the participants.

### **Activity-19: RTI Help Desk**

During the project period RTI help desk provided assistance to 42 journalists of national and local levels on 28 occasions. Help desk facilitated them to select appropriate designated officer and appellate authority and fill-up application, appeal and complaint forms.

## **Challenges:**

- Due to demand of project some activities need to revise along with budget.
- To ensure presence of international experts, some activities needed more time to organize than planned.

## **Sustainability:**

Capacity building initiatives increased skills of journalists and introduced new tools and techniques for their future reporting. Trained reporters can disseminate their knowledge to others.

Awareness and knowledge on safety and security has been increased that will reduce the level of risk for Journalists in future.

Partner media houses enhanced their team capacity with the knowledge of international experts and their practices. It will help them to ensure qualitative journalism.

Moreover, success of the initiative will bring desired positive changes in the mindset of the media owners and the management.