

Project Annual Report

Year-2

(January 2021- December 2021)

*Improved Governance through Open Flow of
Information*



Context

The project “Improved Governance Through Open Flow of Information” began with the aim of enhancing the capacity of media and skills of journalists on producing objective and authentic in-depth stories on issues of public interest using RTI as a tool. It also aimed at developing a group of young women as RTI advocates who will promote and support women’s right of access to information and aware their peers, family members and others.

The rationale behind the initiative was, the media, as part of the civil society and as an independent entity has an important stake in the right of access to information in order to produce in-depth objective stories that will bring the necessary information into the light and unveil corruption and irregularities. Media can use the opportunity of the present government’s commitment to facilitate citizens and journalists make best use of the RTI Act in promoting transparency and accountability at all levels. It will help raise the level of public demand for information and services which will ultimately contribute to attainment of SDG 16.10.2.

But, right after the Covid-19 Pandemic hit, MRDI was concerned about the huge challenges for the local journalists working all over the country. As an organization which works to develop capacity of the media and journalist, MRDI with the support of The Asia Foundation revised the ongoing project according to demand of the crisis. The project supported the district level journalists who were working as front-liners, risking their lives to gather information during the pandemics. To engage newsroom managers and reporters in keeping safe while gathering news is another objective of this project. The project also tried to enhance capacity of youth on fact checking to fight disinformation during Covid-19 and how they would make authorities accountable using RTI during and post Corona situation.

Online sessions have been also organized on Covid-19 safety and RTI for youth groups of seven districts. Seven distance learning session through webinar were organized for them on authentic and specific message on Covid-19 and how to access information using Right to Information (RTI) Act. Experts on Covid-19 conducted the safety sessions. The RTI sessions facilitated the youth on how they can access information related to their life and livelihood during and after the pandemic. Side by side, an online fact checking course has been being developed targeting the youth.

To aware the local journalists on how to keep safe while gathering news during the pandemic and to provide them with a platform where they can share their experience and voice their concern about the pandemic, MRDI organized seven online training and participatory workshop for the journalists from eight divisions. To assess the impact of this pandemic on the journalists, MRDI also conducted a brief survey among the participants from 20 media houses in eight divisions.

Findings from these events revealed that the need for building the capacity of the media and journalists is even greater, as limited media capacity due to media experts’ shortage and media dependence on corporate funding and advertisement has become a driving media capture in Bangladesh. Whereas people need trusted news and information to keep safe from harmful

practices particularly at the time of global outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, trust in the media institutions in Bangladesh has fallen to troubling lows amid a rapidly changing information ecosystem, state-controlled ownership, and a journalist community divided on political lines.

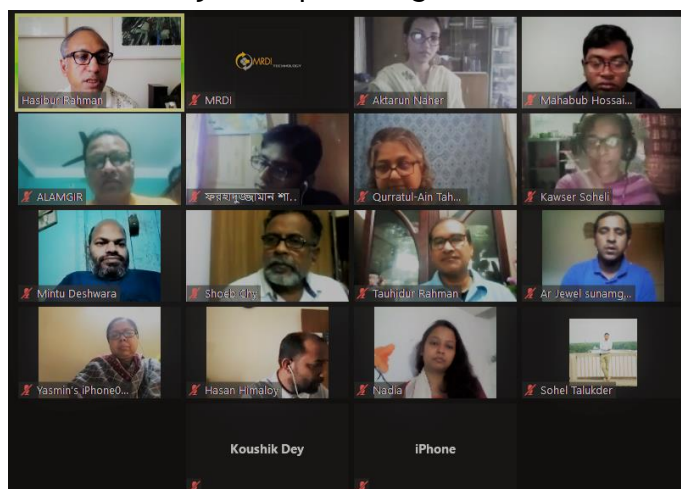
Therefore, MRDI consulting with The Asia Foundation once again revised the project to accommodate the needs of changing media scenario. The objectives and activities are also revised accordingly.

Objectives

1. Enhance capacity of youth on fact checking to fight disinformation during Covid 19 and how they can keep safe and get authentic information during and post Corona situation.
2. Engage newsroom managers and reporters in keeping safe while gathering news.
3. Enhance the level of people's trust in media and assess level of external stakeholders' engagement to strengthen democracy and political participation with an additional focus on the pandemic period through conducting a survey.
4. Facilitate media houses develop their audience engagement plan.
5. Enhance capacity of media and skills of journalists on producing objective and authentic in-depth stories on issues of public interest.

Activity 1: Two-days Mentorship Training on Public Interest Reporting for District Level Journalists

One of the major complaints against the mainstream media is that they don't reflect people's

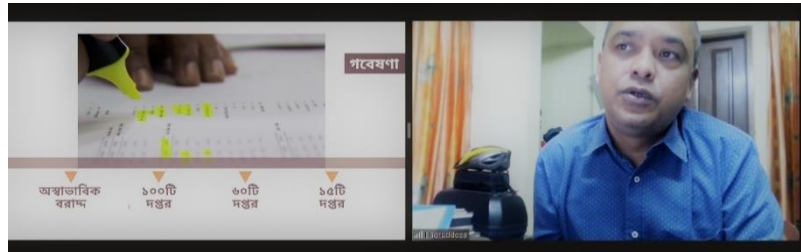


interest through reporting, although credibility of a media depends a lot on such reporting. To facilitate the local journalists to learn what is public interest reporting, its components, how to find public interest angles in a report and issues related to the subject, a two-day training was organized online on 19-20 February 2021. 10 district level journalists from the districts of Joypurhat, Khulna, Hobigonj, Natore, Moulvhibazar, Cumilla, Tangail, Sunamgonj were participated in the

program through zoom platform.

The sessions were conducted by three mentors, Qurratul-Ain-Tahmina, Journalist and trainer; Tauhidur Rahman, writer and journalist and Kawser Soheli, Special correspondent, Maasranga TV along with Badruddoza Babu, Head of Investigative Journalism Helpdesk, MRDI and Hasibur Rahman, Executive Director, MRDI.

During the training participants were introduced to their mentors. However, adult learning interactive methods were applied by the trainers so that the participants can be engaged and communicate with each other.



Activity 2: Mentorship Programme on Public Interest Reporting

Under three experienced journalists as mentors 10 journalists working at local level have gone through a three-month mentorship programme, which was supposed to end in May. However, due to ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and frequent lockdowns in different parts of the country, the time was extended to June. The mentees learnt how to develop a public-interest story through extensive research, required investigation and data collection and also how to tell that story to the audiences. After successful completion of their mentorship, the mentee journalists produced their own reports which were then published in their respective media houses.

Activity 3: Orientation Programme for journalists on Digital Security

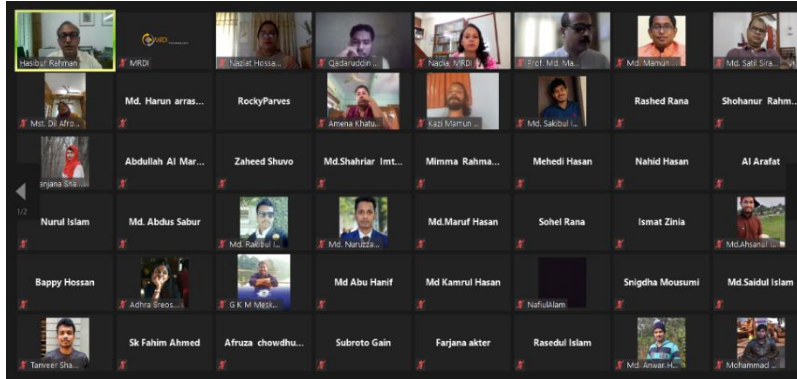
Under this project four in-house training programme were organized on “Digital Security: Journalist’s Safety” for Channel 24, Jamuna Television, Daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star. Each of the house have nominated 20 of their correspondents working at the district levels for the trainings.

MRDI team developed a training content with the help of Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, Editor, GIJN Bangla and then Manager, Programme and Communications MRDI. A two-day session plan was made, including two sessions each day, spanning 4 hours each day. Due to covid-19 pandemic situation the training organized over zoom platform.

Resource persons gave their presentation on the respective topic. Interactive method was taken allowing the participants to address any issue they do not understand, ask questions and expressing their observation.

Activity 4: Orientation programme on Fact checking

With an objective to enhance capacity of youth on fact checking to fight disinformation, MRDI organized orientation programme on fact checking for the students of journalism department Rajshahi University; Jagannath University; Daffodil International University and Independent University Bangladesh.

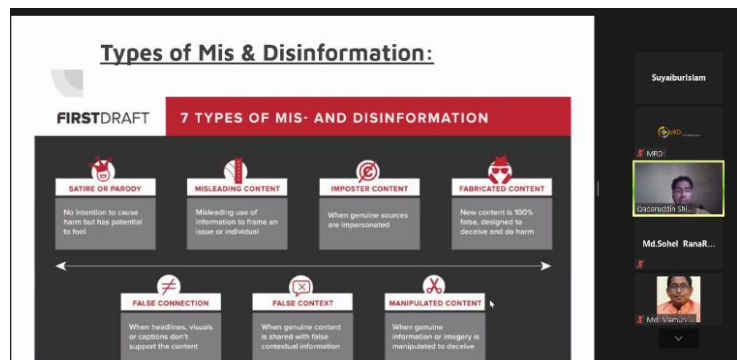


MRDI has taken such an initiative as fake news and misinformation have emerged as one of the major concerns for social and democratic values in Bangladesh. Its spread has grown geometrically with the growth of the number of internet and social media users.

Qadaruddin Shishir, Fact check editor, AFP, Bangladesh moderated all the 4 sessions as resource person. Through a comprehensive presentation, Shishir explained the basics of Fact checking, and also showed the participants some practical approach for fact checking. All the four orientation programmes were conducted online through Zoom Platform.

Besides the students, the faculty members also joined the programme as they thought it would be useful for them too. Chairpersons of respective departments were present at the inaugural sessions.

Some of them expressed deep interest to incorporate Fact-checking in their academic curricula and sought cooperation of MRDI, as expertise on Fact-checking is not that available in Bangladesh.



Activity 5: Survey on People's Trust in Media

This research study was conducted by MRDI with the objective to develop a foundation of understanding in media trust and develop audience segments based on respondents' attitude and behaviour as regards media trust. The study is meant to benefit news outlets, news managers, media development professionals as well as the advertisement industry.

Methodology

The research includes both qualitative and quantitative components.

Qualitative: The research team pursued two types of qualitative research to understand key issues surrounding media trust.

- One-on-one interviews with five news and media professionals to understand their perspective on the current situation with media trust in Bangladesh. Newsroom executives from print, online and television news organisations were interviewed to develop an outline of the industry's concerns about and efforts to address trust among news audiences.

- Based on the landscape described by our interviews with news executives and the factors and trends identified in the review of recent research on media trust globally, the research explored key themes from the perspective of the news consumer. The research held six exploratory focus groups with ten participants each over the first two weeks of April 2021.

Quantitative: Findings of the qualitative research helped lay the foundation for a national quantitative survey on media usage, attitudes, and behaviours toward media. The research conducted 1,344 interviews of which 144 were not used. The calculations to weight the respondent sample to the national profile resulted in a further reduction of 24 respondents for a final weighted sample of 1176.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all survey interviews with respondents were conducted by phone between 26 May and 16 June 2021. The survey was conducted with adults over the age of 18, who use news media and have not worked in the media business as either a journalist or other media business professional in the previous twelve months. To balance the survey, the sample of respondents was weighted based on the 2011 Bangladesh National Census to reflect the national profile of age, gender, education, and location both by division and urban/rural divide.