

1st Yearly Report

(1 January 2023 - 31 December 2023)

Promoting Fact Checking to Counter Misinformation in Bangladesh

Prepared by



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Context

The prevalence of fake news and misinformation poses a significant challenge to the free flow of accurate information in today's world. While fact-checking teams and professionals exist in other countries' media landscapes, Bangladesh has yet to fully recognize their importance. Furthermore, fact-checking remains absent from the journalism education curriculum, leading to a lack of emphasis on this crucial skill among aspiring journalists and students.

Addressing this issue, it is imperative to cultivate a pool of competent journalists in Bangladesh's news media who possess fact-checking expertise. Simultaneously, it becomes essential to provide training to university professors so they can effectively teach journalism students about this subject.

In light of these needs, the **"Promoting Fact Checking to Counter Misinformation in Bangladesh"** project, supported by *Internews*, has been developed with the primary goal of enhancing the fact-checking skills of journalists, young individuals, and university professors. Through this initiative, the aim is to foster a responsive society that can effectively combat misinformation.

The overarching objective of this endeavor is to contribute to Bangladesh's development in alignment with the government's Vision 2041, the Eighth Five-year Plan, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Project Objective

To create a responsive society against misinformation through capacity building of journalists, journalism teachers, and youths on fact checking.

Reporting period: 1 January 2023 - 31 December 2023

Activity Update

Activity-1: ToT Content Development Meeting

A content development meeting was organized at the MRDI conference room on 23 March 2023 to finalize the contents of three-day ToTs on fact checking that will be organized for journalism teachers, journalists and journalism learners. 10 participants including academics, media gatekeepers and fact checking experts participated in the meeting.



Draft session plans presented before the participants for their suggestion and feedback. The meeting also discussed the potential resource person for conducting sessions in the ToT.

Activity-2: ToT on fact-checking for journalists/youth groups/journalism teachers

Fact-checking Training for Teachers

Under this project, MRDI organized a three-day residential “*Fact-checking Training for Teachers*” on 7-9 May 2023 at CCDB Hope Centre, Savar, Dhaka to develop their capacity to teach fact-checking to journalism students.

Twenty journalism teachers from 10 public and private universities of the country participated in the training. The participants were nominated by the respective departments, in response to a request by MRDI. 20% of the participating teachers were female.



The program spanning three days was designed to provide participating teachers with not just theoretical knowledge or lectures, but also hands-on activities, group discussions, and presentations. The training covered 12 sessions along with practical and group activities, with Qadaruddin Shishir, the Bangladesh Editor of AFP Factcheck, facilitating the training out of his expertise in fact-checking. Additionally, Md. Mashihur Rahman, a professor of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at University of Rajshahi, and Minhaj Aman, Research Lead of Dismislab, conducted the sessions as resource persons.

Exercises, lectures, and multimedia presentations were used to conduct the training. Question-and-answer sessions, group discussions and hands-on activities were applied to make the sessions participatory and interesting. Pre and post training knowledge assessment and the training evaluation made the outcome and quality of the training visible.

Following the training, participating teachers were asked to conduct a one-day fact-checking training for a diverse and gender-equitable group of 10 students in their respective departments to exchange experiences, tips, and troubleshoot, and to network for future collaborations. In this regard, they will conduct their sessions from 1 June 2023 to 31 August 2023.

Training of Trainers (ToT) on Fact-checking for Women Journalists

Under this project, MRDI organized a three-day residential “Training of Trainers (ToT) on Fact-checking for Women Journalists” on 16-18 July 2023 at CCDB Hope Centre, Savar, Dhaka to develop their capacity on fact-checking to combat the spread of misinformation.



Nineteen women journalists of national and local news outlets participated in the training following an open call. Forty-four applications for the training through an open call were received and 20 women journalists were selected considering their work experiences and ability to organize a peer training later to share their learnings. However, one of them couldn't participate due to illness at the last hour.

The program spanning three days was designed to provide the journalists with not just theoretical knowledge or lectures, but also hands-on activities, group discussions, and presentations. The training covered 11 sessions along with practical and group activities, with Qadaruddin Shishir, the Bangladesh Editor of AFP Factcheck, facilitating the training out of his expertise in fact-checking.

Additionally, Md. Mashihur Rahman, a professor of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at University of Rajshahi, and Mohammad Ali Mazed, Fact Checker of AFP Factcheck, conducted the sessions as resource persons.

Exercises, lectures, and multimedia presentations were used to conduct the training. Question-and-answer sessions, group discussions and hands-on activities were applied to make the sessions participatory and interesting. Pre and post training knowledge assessment and the training evaluation made the outcome and quality of the training visible.



Following the training, participating journalists were asked to conduct a half-day fact-checking training for a diverse and gender-equitable group of 10 peers to exchange experiences. In this regard, they signed Terms of Reference (ToR) with MRDI to conduct their sessions from 20 July 2023 to 20 September 2023.

Assessment and observation

Journalism teachers: Knowledge assessment was conducted with the journalism teachers attended the ToT before and after the training session using the same set of questionnaire. The assessment questionnaire was developed based on the issues to be discussed in the sessions.

The assessment result shows improvement of knowledge on the topics discussed. Aggregate score of the participants increased from 145 in the pre assessment to 177 in the post.

The training program was well-received by the participants and teachers, with 95% agreement that it fulfilled expectations and provided useful and relevant information. Additionally, the trainers were praised for their competence and helpfulness by 95% of the participants.

The teachers found the practical sessions most useful including photo, video, & source verification, online investigation, and geolocation. On the other hand, traditional lectures on fact-checking, ethics of IFCN and the archiving method seemed least useful. And they learnt the practical sessions on fact-checking tools most effectively.



The teachers also expressed that the learnings from the training will enable them to utilize fact-checking in their professional development as faculty by sharing with students, enriching them in this issue and involving fact-checking in their curriculum.

Journalists: The knowledge assessment result the journalists participated in the ToT shows improvement of knowledge on the topics discussed. Aggregate score of the participants increased from 134 in the pre assessment to 167 in the post.

The training program was well-received by the participants, with 78.95% agreement that it fulfilled expectations while all of them agreed that the training provided useful and relevant information. Additionally, the trainers were praised for their competence and helpfulness by 89.47% of the participants. Meanwhile, the journalists' evaluation of their knowledge of the sessions shows that 48.95% of them had minimum knowledge on the theoretical & practical sessions. After the training, 70% of the participants pointed out that they gained better knowledge in these sessions.

Based on these findings, the participating teachers & journalists suggested following recommendations:

- Allocate more time for practical sessions when preparing the modules.
- Invite fact-checkers from international media to take sessions in the training programme.
- Incorporate audio verification into the fact-checking module.
- Organize a series of follow-up for those who have completed the program.

Activity-3: Training for peer educator journalists/youth groups/journalism teachers

Fact-checking Training for Journalism Students

Following the Terms of Reference (ToR) with MRDI after the *Fact-checking Training for Teachers*, 20 journalism teachers of ten universities conducted half-day training sessions at their respective departments with a total of 237 students in all.



The session plan, developed by themselves, focuses on media literacy and fact-checking, emphasizing the importance of information literacy in today's digital age. They provided an overview of information on literacy and fact-checking that includes defining various types of misinformation such as disinformation, malformation, propaganda, and rumors. The objective was to help participants understand the significance of fact-checking in distinguishing between reliable and misleading information.



Their session also delved into the theory and practice of fact-checking. Participants learnt about the principles and ethics involved in fact-checking, as well as the methodology, tools, and techniques employed in the

process along with practical exercises on how to verify the authenticity of images and videos.

Fact-checking Training for Peer Educator Journalist



Following the Terms of Reference (ToR) with MRDI after the Training of Trainers on Fact-checking for Women Journalists, 18 journalists conducted half-day training sessions with a total of 195 journalists this quarter. A basic session plan & presentation on fact-checking were shared with the journalist.

In the follow-on sessions, the journalists shared an overview of information on literacy and fact-checking that includes defining various types of misinformation such as disinformation, malformation, propaganda, and rumors with their peers. They also discussed how to find fact-checkable claims and verify online source, photos, videos and geolocation using different tools in journalism.



Activity-4: Revised FD-6 Approval from NGOAB

According to the government rule, the project, with new activities and changes in activity budget keeping the the overall budget and timeframe same, was submitted to NGO Affairs Bureau based on their prescribed format and got approval on 1 June 2023.

There had been some changes in activity timeline for smooth implementation and ensuring proper outcome. Also some new activities were added.