

Project Report, Year-2

1 November 2023 to 30 April 2024

Media Strengthening Democracy

Prepared by



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Context

Media, considered as the fourth pillar of a state, plays a vital role in creating an informed citizenry through ensuring continuous and free flow of information. According to a recent study, the news environment in Bangladesh has grown more complex over the past decade, undermining public trust in the news media and depriving the public of reliable information. As much as the Bangladeshi media is active in delivering breaking news, it is not as active in producing quality reports. The credibility and trust of readers/viewers in the media can be effectively restored by in-depth reporting on important issues of public interest.

Quality journalism faces several challenges, including a lack of professionalism, self-imposed censorship, and barriers to information availability, but there are also examples of some excellent journalism too. Keeping this in mind, broader media distribution of in-depth analysis, constructive criticism, and public interest reporting is required, with an emphasis on high-quality journalism.

The project "Media Supporting Democracy" has been developed with a consideration to this context as a background. The project's primary goal is to strengthen the role of the media by improving journalists' abilities to report on topics of public interest and raising their knowledge of digital security.

Project Objective

To strengthen role of news outlets through capacity building of journalists on public interest reporting and create awareness on digital safety.



Activity performed

Activity-1: Award mentorship on public interest reporting

81 selected district correspondents from 9 news outlets who took part in 2-day in-house training on public interest journalism and accountability tools organized earlier, got the opportunity to utilize their knowledge gained through the in-house training in producing quality public interest stories under supervision and guidance of mentors.

During this year 27 mentorships have been completed which publication or on-air of 26 stories addressing various public interest concerns at the district level. Five mentees dropped out from the mentorship programme.

Activity-4: Journalist Training on Digital Safety and Security

Two-day training on digital safety and security organised in six batches with an objective to create awareness among the district correspondents how to keep safe their information in handling digital devices. District correspondents nominated by 15 national print, TV and online news outlet participated in these trainings.



Participants

Twenty district correspondents participated in each batch. A total of 119 participants reached through 6 batches training.



Sessions and resource persons

The sessions covered various aspects of digital safety and security including securing devices, encryption, data management, source protection, keeping source and document safe, fake news and fact-checking, and understanding the implications of the Cyber Security Act. Journalists were empowered with the knowledge and skills to recognize potential threats, safeguard their work, and use secure communication tools to protect the confidentiality of their sources.



Discussion of the sessions stressed on the improvement of participants self-awareness regarding computer and device utilization and online risk management.

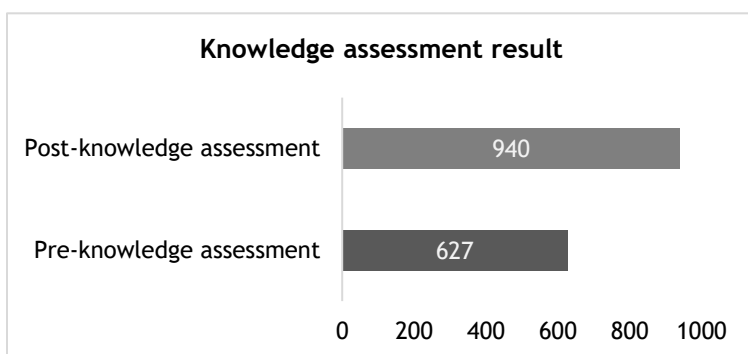
The training also addressed best practices for minimizing hacking and data breaches, ensuring that journalists can confidently navigate the digital landscape.

Session method

Exercises, lectures, and multimedia presentations were used to conduct the training.

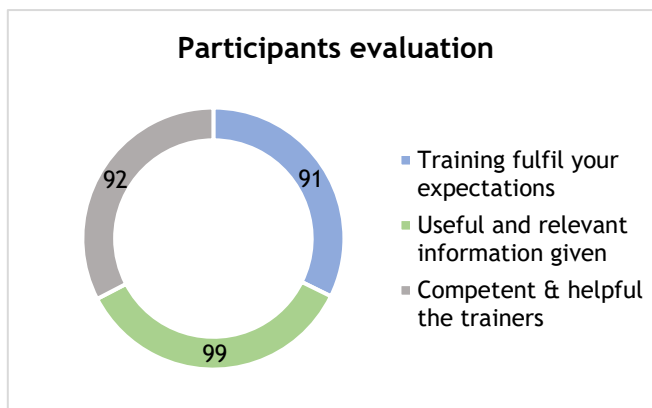
Knowledge assessment

Knowledge assessment was conducted with the training participants 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 significant improvement of knowledge on the topics discussed.



Evaluation and observation

The training program was well-received by the participants, with 91% agreement that it fulfilled expectations. 99% agreed that the training provided useful and relevant information. Additionally, the trainers were praised for their competence and helpfulness by 92% of the participants.



Participants noted the training's provision of valuable insights into matters such as secure communication, social media security and app installations. They also appreciated sessions on password protection and digital security, the importance of refraining from downloading unfamiliar or temporary emails to mitigate device vulnerabilities, and the significance of verification applications. Participants emphasized that learning in the various sections of the Cyber Security Act has sensitized them on how to safely navigate the CSA during reporting.

Participants acknowledged that the training sessions improved their self-awareness regarding computer and device utilization, along with an enhanced knowledge of security regulations. They acquired fresh perspectives on online risk management, while also recognizing the significance of employing VPN for secure browsing on public Wi-Fi networks.

Some participants encountered entirely new concepts such as encryption, the use of temporary email, and file locking.

Participants affirmed their commitment to utilizing security tools to enhance digital safety in both personal and professional life. Evaluations underscored that the acquired knowledge from this training will play a key role in strengthening security for individuals and their careers, while also mitigating potential risks in journalism.

Furthermore, attendees pledged to adopt strategies to safeguard information on digital devices and expressed interest in implementing the newly acquired skills in ensuring secure use of laptops, desktops, and mobile devices.



Activity 2- Engagement with Newsroom

As per project plan one newsroom engagement meeting was organized at MRDI office to discuss how public interest stories can attract media audience and enhance their trust in media thus contribute to sustainability of the news outlets. A total of 11 participants including news managers of the news outlets where public interest journalism training and mentorship programme were organized and the mentors who supervised and guided the journalists in the mentorship programme participated in the meeting.

The discussion focused on the evaluation of the mentorship stories produced under this project. Mentors and news managers highlighted their experience during the mentorship period. They appreciated the enthusiasm of district correspondents who tried to properly utilize the knowledge gained from the training sessions. But at the same time, they urged on the needs of continuous capacity building programmes for the district correspondents that will be beneficial to bring more public interest issues through quality reporting.

Activity 3- Orientation on Public Interest Journalism for national desk managers

National desk managers are the responsible person for editing the reports received from the district correspondents before going to publish. They are playing an important role in presenting the main message and public interest issues of the news accurately through necessary editing.

A daylong orientation for the national desk managers on public interest journalism organized to facilitate their work with updated knowledge and technics. 15 sub-editors and newsroom editors from 8 news outlets participated in the programme.



The discussion started with the role of sub-editor/ newsroom editor and their relationship with the reporters. It also focused on the theoretical knowledge and existing practices in the newsroom. Participants placed some of their edited reports as example to facilitate the effective discussion.

In the session on ways of ideal news editing, the issue experts emphasized on judging news; verifying sources, information and evidence; bullet proofing; ensuring ethics and identifying risk. The efficient way of editing public interest report discussed in detail at this stage.

Participants got the opportunity to analyse their edited stories based on the discussion of the orientation through the group work session.



Activity 4- Analysing trend of publishing reports through monitoring media contents

A media monitoring is being conducted to analyse the trends of published reports on politics, democracy, and election. This monitoring covers 7 TV channels, 7 newspapers, and 2 online portals. The results of this analysis will be used for designing a comprehensive capacity-building program for journalists in the future.