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Strengthening Capacity of Media to Promote Democracy



Mass media in Bangladesh has been expanded significantly over the years across the country and playing a crucial role in social upliftment. Emergence of new media in the last one decade has created numerous opportunities for many people to be debuted as a journalist in national, regional, and local level.

Nevertheless, many of them have huge setbacks in understanding professional ethics. Even journalists are not aware of their own safety and security, and surprisingly even not trained up to combat professional hazards like threats, intimidation, and violence. On the contrary, there are hardly any institutional initiatives to protect journalists from the hazards.

Most of the local journalists of Bangladesh are facing numerous challenges while performing their professional duties. Particularly, while covering big events like national elections, political meeting, election campaign and democratic movement where journalists need to be more equipped with professional skills and technics to mitigate safety-related risks.

One of such landmark events is the next general election which is likely to be held in the first week of January in 2024. General election is a routine event in a democratic country like Bangladesh where media can play an important role. As a watchdog, media can enlighten and educate the public through disseminating accurate information and can act as a neutral, objective platform for free flow of information. Especially, they can add more value to the society and make people more aware about their democratic, human and voter rights and promote inclusive society through publishing exclusive reports.

With this understanding, News Network has undertaken a year-long project titled, 'Strengthening Capacity of Media to Promote Democracy', with support of Internews and funded

by the USAID. It aims to improve the efficiency and professional excellence of journalists in election reporting to produce quality report. Similarly, production of multiple curricula on election reporting and physical and digital safety will help journalists to bolster their safety and securities during big events.

Objectives

The overarching objective of the project is to enhance the capacity of national, regional, and local journalists across the country for maintaining highest ethical standard, accuracy, and objectivity to promote democracy and good governance in the country.

Activities

Major activities of the project include developing a training curriculum, for Training of Trainers (ToT) for the journalists covering national or regional elections to create a resource pool of experts who will later be able to deliver election reporting training at regional/grassroots level in the country. The TOT will focus best practices in election reporting on close spaces, fact-checking and journalists' safety including physical, digital, and legal issues identifying as potential risks and preventions. During the TOT, the participants have to design a three-day training course in groups. Later, the TOT graduates will facilitate the rollout of election reporting trainings for journalists working for national, regional or local media across four divisions and regional hubs/bureaus in the country.

The project will organize 20 election reporting trainings of which one training will be dedicated to women journalists, and all trainings will strive for gender parity and diversity. Training participants and trainers will be connected via a secure platform of their choice (e.g., WhatsApp, Signal,

Telegram) to share tips, incoming rumors, and fact-checked information, and promote general networking opportunities in future.

In addition, the project will provide “story grants” to journalists to produce multimedia content or in-depth stories on election-related appropriate to Bangladesh’s sensitive political environment... Grantees will be selected based on the quality of their participation in training and of their story ideas. The grantees will receive mentoring guidance from experienced senior journalists and editors at key stages of story production, which will help them report safely and maintain legal precautions, essential to our 'Do No Harm' approach.

