

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

**NEWS
NETWORK**

*working for
social change and
empowering people*

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Acronyms

EU	: European Union
HRDs	: Human Rights Defenders
W/HRDs	: Women Human Rights Defenders
CSOs	: Civil society organisations
NGOs	: Non-government organisations
RRLs	: Rural religious leaders
RMPs	: Rural media people
USS	: Udayankur Seba Sangstha
CC	: Central Caucus
DLC	: District Level Caucus
BHRDF	: Bangladesh Human Rights Defenders Forum
DC	: Deputy Commissioner
SP	: Superintended of Police

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A 3-year News Network project supported by the European Union ended in December 2020. The project was aimed at strengthening the capacity of rural women/human rights defenders (W/HRDs) working to protect and promote women's and girls' rights in Bangladesh. News Network implemented the project in cooperation with co-partner Udayankur Seba Sangstha (USS) in eight remote districts of Jashore, Satkhira, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Kurigramme. Most of districts are adjacent to Bangladesh-India international border. Human rights defenders include journalists, members of CSOs and religious leaders. Several activities were implemented during the year for further improvement of professional capacity and knowledge of the W/HRDs to face the challenges threatening women's and girls' rights.

Besides, in 2020 the High Commission of Canada to Bangladesh supported a project with a view to developing journalists' reporting skills on religious issues with respected to human rights. The project implemented in three districts of Mymensingh division including Mymensingh, Sherpur and Netrokona.

The reporting year was also significant for News Network for signing a new project agreement with Internews, an international organisation, aimed at promoting digital and physical safety of journalists in six divisions. The project activities include developing a group of journalist trainers and organising field level training-workshop for local journalists, working for regional and national print and electronic media. By this time, News Network has successfully completed some major activities in Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna and Barishal divisions. Some activities are under implementation in Sylhet and Rajshahi divisions.

The budget for the year 2020 was BDT. 39,811,942 (USD 479,662) and the expenditure stood at BDT. 25,405,663 (USD 306082).



Shahiduzzaman
Editor and Chief Executive Officer
News Network

News Network envisions a steady and prosperous nation where the citizens are aware of their rights, enjoy freedom of expression and live with dignity and gender equality and where the media is free.

Partners of the Year



The European Union



Internews
Local voices. Global change.

Activity supported by the
Canada Fund for Local Initiatives

Activité réalisée avec l'appui du
Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales

Canada 



A snapshot of capacity development activities of rural human rights defenders on advocacy, lobbying and negotiation skills to promote women's and girls' rights. The programme, funded by the European Union, was held in Dinajpur, a northern district of Bangladesh, in November-December 2020 – *News Network*

Projects of the Year 2020

Projects	Support	Status
Programme for Promoting Digital and Physical Safety of Journalists	Internews	Ongoing
Supporting Human Rights Defenders working for women's and girls' rights in Bangladesh	The European Union	Completed
Strengthening Capacity of Journalists to promote religious freedom and peace	High Commission of Canada to Bangladesh	Completed



A photograph of News Network's ongoing programme for strengthening digital safety and physical security for journalists. The programme was held on December 19-20, 2020 at Chattogram, the second largest city and financial capital of the country. International media development organization Internews supports the initiative aiming to foster media independence in Bangladesh – *News Network*

Progress of Projects

1. Programme for Promoting Digital and Physical Safety of Journalists

The project aims -- programme for promoting digital and physical safety of journalists -- at Strengthening Independence Media in Bangladesh (SIMB). It has been built upon the fact that professional and citizen journalists in Bangladesh experience pressure and physical threats meant to stifle independent voices. Compounded by this increasingly hostile operational environment, media in Bangladesh is



Journalists from Barishal division participating in a two-day training programme on digital and physical safety issues at Barishal Divisional headquarters on November 22-23, 2020
– *News Network*

influenced greatly by corporate ownership and political allegiances, resulting in self-censorship at individual and editorial levels. SIMB seeks to foster media independence in Bangladesh by strengthening the capacity of investigative journalism focusing on building skills in digital and physical security, reducing self-censorship, and addressing lack of media freedoms. The Objective of the project is to increase digital and physical security of journalists, bloggers and other media professionals who cover accountability, democratic governance, religious issues and secularism.

To achieve the objective News Network with the support from Internews, an international organisation, has launched a 12-month project, “Programme for Promoting Digital and Physical Safety of Journalists” in April 2020 in the country’s six divisions -- Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, Barishal, Sylhet and Rajshahi. The key activities of the project are to develop a group of journalist trainers and organise four field level trainings on digital and physical safety of journalists working with print and electronic media.



To develop a group of trainers on digital and physical safety issues, News Network organised a three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) for journalists at Saver, Dhaka from September 27-29, 2020 with financial support from Internews. About 15 mid-career journalists from across the country took part in the training. A senior journalist is seen conducting a ToT session – *News Network*

To achieve the goal and objectives, News Network organised a three-day training of trainers (ToT) in Dhaka in September 2020. Fifteen mid-career journalists working for mainstream print and electronic media from across the country participated in the training. Besides, field trainings were organised in Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet. Ninety-three journalists, working for regional and national media participated in the two-day training programme on digital and physical safety issues. Graduate journalists from ToT programme conducted the trainings.

The programme was the demand of the time. Participant journalists found the training highly effective for performing their professional duties. They appreciated the course content, training quality and the whole programme as a whole and requested the authorities concerned to organise more refresher trainings for better understanding.

Digital and Physical Safety training essential for journalists: *Monira Begum Munni, Senior Staff Correspondent of The Financial Express.*

“The 3-day residential TOT programme on ‘Digital and Physical Safety of Journalists’ jointly organized by Internews and News Network opened many new areas before us especially in digital security,” said Monira. “I was personally unaware of many of the digital issues before the training and was almost naive how to preserve many passwords, how to keep confidential information intact, files protected and how to safely communicate through emails. But after the training now I know how to protect computer from malware and hackers and how to protect information from physical threats”, said Munni adding that it was an eye-opening event and helped her greatly in her professional life.



Monira Begum Munni

Greatly influenced by News Network training: *Mohammad Nuruzzaman, Bureau Chief of Dainik Alokito Bangladesh in Khulna.*



Mohammad Nuruzzaman

“I am greatly influenced by the training. To me it seems to be very effective and innovative. I learnt a lot of new things about security issues, both in digital and physical, in this workshop. The things I learnt in the workshop will help me greatly in my professional life,” said Mohammad Nuruzzaman, Bureau Chief of Dainik Alokito Bangladesh in Khulna.

News Network training would help me greatly: *Malissa Mithila Marma, Sub Editor, The Daily Purbodesh, Chattogram*



Malissa Mithila Marma

I was one of the fortunate participants in this workshop and learned in depth about digital and physical safety, said Malissa Mithila Marma. According to Marma, she personally wasn't aware of the fact that even a tiny carelessness in digital life could cause a big harm. The subjects were interesting but it would have been more useful if we can practise the lessons for a longer time in presence of our trainers, she said. The venue was overall good. The workshop was overall very helpful.

Thanks to Internews and News Network for arranging such an effective workshop, said Marma. She hoped that the authorities will arrange more workshops in future for women journalists who are not getting enough opportunity to work equally with their male colleagues.

IT changes media paradigm: *Sk. Al-Ehsan, Staff Correspondent, Prothom Alo, Khulna*



Sk. Al-Ehsan

Once journalists sent handwritten news through fax, telegraphs. With change of time things are changed. Now we are using emails, but many of us do not know what are the safe use of computers, encrypted emails and the challenges of digital communications. We couldn't know how digital media turns into digital dangers unless we attended the training. Thanks to the News Network as well as the Internews. "Now, after the training, we can at least know how to protect emails and use internet safely, how to protect computer from malware and hackers and how to protect information from physical threats," said Sk. Al-Ehsan of the Prothom Alo.



A scene of a two-week interactive meeting among rural women human rights defenders working for promoting and protecting women's and girls' rights. Participants including journalists, representatives of CSOs, religious and opinion leaders and youths attended the meeting held in Rangpur from October 15- November 1, 2020. – *News Network*

2. Programme for Supporting Human Rights Defenders Working for Women's and Girls' Rights in Bangladesh

It was a three-year project supported by the European Union. News Network implemented the project in eight remote districts in the country in cooperation of a local NGO named USS since January 2018. The beneficiaries of the project were the rural women/human rights defenders (W/HRDs) working to protect women's and girls' rights in Bangladesh. The beneficiaries were drawn from various professional and social groups. They are rural media practitioners (RMPs), particularly news reporters and media gatekeepers (e.g. local



A snapshot of a group of Jashore based human rights defenders participating in a three-day training-workshop on advocacy, lobbying and negotiation with a view to promoting women's and girls' rights. News Network organised the event in November 2020 with support from the European Union – *News Network*

newspapers owners, editors, executive editors and news editors), young women journalists, representatives of rural CSOs and religious leaders. The objectives of the initiative were (i) to recognise and promote the role of W/HRDs in protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and help them addressing the challenges like intimidation, harassment, life risks and threats. (ii) to support and protect the defenders at risk due to their work for promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls.

Due to sudden outbreak of deadly Coronavirus in the country, it has become tough and crucial to implement the plan activities in project areas during the project period. But the organisation eventually managed to complete the major activities which included (i) conducting training for W/HRDs on national and international laws standard to protect women's and girls' rights, (ii) training-workshop for W/HRDs on advocacy, lobbying and negotiation, (iii) keep continuing the publication of quarterly newsletter, (iv) organising annual central



A group of rural human rights defenders are seen participating in a training programme in Rajshahi for better understanding of national and international laws relevant to protect women's and girls' rights. The European Union supported the training programme held in August 2020 – *News Network*

caucus conference 2020 and (v) publishing a lesson book based on learnings from the project implementation, (vi) replication of workshops and (vii) conducting end evaluation of the project.

The project has proved its effectiveness to protect and promote women's and girls' rights. As well as it has drawn attention of local people and authorities concerned. Government officials and public representatives extended their full supports during its implementation stages and highly appreciated the project activities.

The project goals and objectives were achieved successfully. As well as it has many successes, most important among them are; (i) the project successfully mobilised the W/HRDs and build up their



A religious leader in Nilphamari receiving certificate after successful completion of a three-day training programme on national and international laws relevant to protect women's and girls' rights. A series of trainings on the issues were held in August 2020 at Nilphamari district town. The programme was jointly organised by News Network and Udayankur Seba Sangstha (USS) – *News Network*

capacity to protect women's and girls' rights. Earlier they were disorganised and less skilled with limited knowledge and even not aware of their safety and security, (ii) organised and established defenders' forum named 'District Level Caucus – DLC' in each project district and a national forum 'Central Caucus' also called Bangladesh Human Rights Defenders Forum –BHRDF' (iii) W/HRDs are now well skilled in protecting and promoting women rights. (iv) DLC and BHRDF are well active and visible in their respected districts and (v) awarded 4-month fellowships to 60 potential young women journalists on human rights journalism during the project period. Many of those fellows are now active in journalism profession. In fact, it (empowering women journalists) has been demanded for a long as journalism in Bangladesh is widely gender imbalanced. Still it's a long way to go to achieve the gender equality in media.

Defenders' feedback on risk analysis and security planning training



Rimon Rahman

News Network teaches how to protest Human Rights violation: *Rimon Rahman, Journalist, Rajshahi*

Journalists in Bangladesh very often face harassment, intimidation and even physical assaults but hardly they get any supports even from professional organizations. "But I am lucky as whenever I feel any problem I get support from News Network, the organization that taught me the basics of journalism and helped develop my skills and methods for human rights reporting," said Rimon Rahman, a grassroots level journalist who works for various national dailies as district correspondent from Rajshahi. "I received a number of trainings from News Network on basics of journalists, investigative journalism and elements and ethics of human rights reporting," said Rimon adding that the trainings helped me expand my personal and technical skills to investigate and cover human rights issues. "I am now more confident and face the challenges of human rights violation with courage and honesty," said Rimon who now works as general secretary of Rajshahi district Human Rights Defenders forum -- District Level Caucus.

Need to protect human rights defenders: *Anisur Rahman, President, Sathkhira District Caucus*



Anisur Rahman

Human Rights Defenders forum condemned violation of women and girls' rights in Sathkhira, Sylhet and Noakhali recently. They rushed to the families of victims of violence in Sathkhira and courageously spoke about their ordeal and demanded justice from local authorities.

They also condemned physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring even in the families and urged the human rights defenders, civil society organisations, journalists, layers and local authorities to work united to establish law of rights in the society. Human rights defenders are playing vital role in creating public awareness besides extending helps to the families of victims.

Fellows' opinion on human rights journalism fellowship programme

Owe to News Network for building confidence:

Madina Akhter, Correspondent, Daily Uttara Protidin, Rajshahi.



Madina Akhter

"I am very fond of writing since my childhood. The hobby turned into a profession when I received a journalism fellowship offered by the News Network that taught me the basics of writing and reporting. I learned the skills and technics of writing and reporting on various issues, elements and ethics of human rights reporting and gained a sound understanding of the concept of human rights," said Madina Akhter of Daily Uttara Protidin. The training, Madina said, taught them the basics of journalism, how to investigate and report on human rights issues and encouraged us to stand against all sorts of violation against

human rights. "I am thankful to News Network for the fellowship that inspired me to work as a journalist as well as a human rights defenders," she added.

News Network helps develop my professional skills:

Laboni Yeasmin, Reporter, Daily Observer



Laboni Yeasmin

I attended a New Network's training programme on "Risk assessment and safety plan" at Rangpur last year that inspired me to adopt journalism as my career, said Laboni Yeasmin, a woman journalist who works for Daily Observer from Rangpur. The training was a little bit different. In the workshop they were briefed on risks assessment and security strategies and risks that they might be exposed to, and learnt how to minimize the risks. They learnt the ways and best practices in protecting ourselves while covering assignments in hostile environments. "We learnt in practical how to write news stories, feature and articles

on various issues and elements and ethics of human rights reporting. We learned the technique how to write articles on sensational issues like religious freedom and peace, tolerance and communal harmony. We were also introduced to investigative journalism, citizen journalism, blogs, social media stories behind stories," said Laboni.



Delegates attending the Annual Conference of Central Caucus (CC) are taking oath to keep continue their activities to defend and promote women's and girls' rights beyond the project period. The conference was held at Rangpur Divisional Headquarter on December 29, 2020. The caucus has been established with support from the European Union and got strengthened its capacity – *News Network*

On December 29, 2020 the third annual conference of central caucus (CC) was held in Rangpur city, a northern divisional headquarters. Before closing the conference all the representatives took oath to keep continue the initiative beyond the project period. The defenders also planned to establish similar forum in neighbouring districts too. The CC has already adopted their constitution to run it democratically. The project also trained up the CC and DLC members on organisational management and leadership issues. About 1050 members are directly benefited from the project and many of them are now more confident and courageous.



Leaders of the Central Caucus are seen in taking oath. – *News Network*



Leaders and members of the Central Caucus (CC) and organisers are seen in the photo.
– *News Network*

The best learning of the project is that the initiatives are very much effective and potential to replicate in other districts of Bangladesh and even may be in other countries where women's and girls' rights are often violated, become victim of violence and the human rights defenders are facing numerous threats and challenges. Similarly, the external project evaluator also recommended to undertake such kind of project in other remote districts of the country, particularly, to mobilise the rural HRDs and strengthen their capacity to protect and promote human rights, create civic space, combat violence against women, marginalised people and religious minority communities. The European Union and other donors may continue their supports on such initiative.



Journalists in Mymensingh participating in a training workshop on religious tolerance, peace and communal harmony issues. The programme was held on January 18-21, 2020 at Mymensingh divisional headquarters – *News Network*

3. Strengthening Capacity of Journalists to Promote Freedom of Religion and Peace

This is for the second time News Network received support from the High Commission of Canada to Bangladesh and launched the project in January 2020 in three districts of Mymensingh division including Mymensingh, Sherpur and Netrokona. Objectives of the project were to promote religious freedom and tolerance as well as protect the rights of minority people through media action. Under this project activities News Network has sensitised and trained up 99 journalists, including 74 local news reporters and 25 media gatekeepers e.g., editor, executive editor and news editors. Most of the journalists attended such kind of a training programme first time in their professional life.



Media gatekeepers of major newspapers published from the Mymensingh division are seen in the photo. About 25 media gatekeepers participated in a two- day interactive meeting on role of media in promoting religious freedom held on February 8-9, 2021 – *News Network*



Journalists participated in a training programme on Religious Tolerance Issues held on 3- 6 February 2020 at Netrokona district town. – *News Network*



A group photo of the journalists participating in a training programme on Religious Tolerance Issues held on 25 – 28 January 2020 at Sherpur district town. – *News Network*

Participants, particularly the trained news reporters published several reports in regional and national media based on their field visit during the training period in project areas. Besides, the project also commissioned in-depth reporting items on the issues to some potential trained journalists and that was widely covered by both the print and electronic media. The media gatekeepers are now more concerned and giving importance to published reports on religious freedom issues with respect to human rights and peace.

Financial
Statement



News Network

Consolidated Accounts

Receipts and Payments Account

For the period from January 2020 to December 2020

PARTICULARS	Details	AMOUNT
RECEIPTS:		
OPENING BALANCE (01.01.2020)		
Cash in hand	673.1	
Cash at Bank	10562815.5	
		10,563,488.60
Fund received from Donors:		19,674,225.42
European Union	15513799.25	
High Commission of Canada	164117.38	
Internews, USA	3996308.79	
Advance recovery against office rent		13,000.00
Bank Interest		20,086.89
News Network Contribution		2,100.00
Others		5,000.00
	TOTAL	30,277,900.91
Brochure, Training manual, Newsletter & lesson book prepare		1,297,100.00
Participatory & advocacy capacity gap assesment for women human rights defenders		8,050.00
Facilitating the RMPs, RCSO leaders and RRLs in forming and strengthening the caucuses and their network		221,078.00
Training on Women's & Girl's rights & international law standards		4,046,469.00

Training on negotiation, advocacy, lobbying, litigation, strategy change, researching, Monitoring, documenting and reporting	5,044,254.00
Awarding fellowship to potential young Women journalists	271,000.00
Providing medical and psycho-social assistance, legal counseling and any other support to the rural W/HRDs	22,320.00
Facilitate participation of rural W/HRDs as accountability agent	77,779.00
Organise replication workshop at district level	349,066.00
Preparation of phasing Out Plan	65,770.00
Improved Lead Applicants web page as visibility to upload action's	7,000.00
Visibility actions through signboards, boards, brochures, advertisement, banner, festools	258,200.00
Evaluation cost	490,000.00
Indirect cost	1,495,769.00
Program staff salary	3,103,482.00
Staff Per diems for missions / travel	692,577.00
Local transportation	356,598.00
Vehicle fuel & mtc.costs	48,910.00
Translation services	4,000.00
Administrative / Support staff salary	3,074,815.53
Office Rent Dhaka & Regional Offices	1,167,000.00
Bank charge	35,114.30
Other services (tel/fax, electricity/heating, maintenance	283,915.00
Consumables - Office supplies	154,541.00
Expenditure verification/Audit	103,500.00
Training workshop for journalists on religious tolerance issues	920,285.00

Interaction meeting with local media gatekeepers on religious tolerance issues		147,300.00
Commissioning reports on religious issues		171,000.00
Development of Training Manual		74,150.00
Training of trainers on digital & physical safety		455,946.00
Training of journalists on digital & physical safety		818,974.00
Laptop-2		115,025.00
Printer-1		22,575.00
Entertainment		2,100.00
Total expenditure		25,405,662.83
CLOSING BALANCE (31.12.2020)		
Cash In hand	957.10	
Cash at Bank	4,871,280.98	
		4,872,238.08
	TOTAL	30,277,900.91



CERTIFICATE GIVEN BY THE AUDITORS

We have audited the accounts of **NEWS NETWORK**, Registration no. FDR-922, dated 20.03.1995 for the Year ended 31 December 2020 and examined all relevant books and vouchers and certifies that according to audited accounts.

1. The brought forward foreign donation at the beginning of year 1st January 2020 was Tk. 10,563,489.
2. The foreign donation amounting to Tk. 19,674,225 was received by the organization during the period.
3. The balance of unutilized foreign donations by the organization at 31st December 2020 Tk. 4,872,238.
4. Foreign donation amounting to Tk. 25,405,662.83 has been utilized for the following purposes (shown project wise).

NAME OF THE PROJECT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programme for Supporting Human Rights Defenders Working for Women's and Girls' Rights in Bangladesh. 2. Strengthening the Capacity of Journalists to Promote Freedom of Religion and Peace 3. Programme for Promoting Digital and Physical Safety of Journalists
FUNDING AGENCY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Union 2. High Commission of Canada 3. Internews, USA

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Name of the project (s)	Budget for this year	Amount spent this year	Difference
Programme for Supporting Human Rights Defenders Working for Women's and Girl's Rights in Bangladesh.	33,269,831	20,773,155.5	12,496,675.5
Strengthening the Capacity of Journalists to Promote Freedom of Religion and Peace	1,667,500	1,552,885	114,615
Programme for Promoting Digital and Physical Safety of Journalists	4,872,000	3,077,011.81	1,794,988.19
News Network Own Fund	2,610.52	2,610.52	-
Total Taka	39,811,941.52	25,405,662.83	14,406,278.69

Total Expenditure in BDT 25,405,662.83 (Equivalent to USD 306,092.32/ EURO 246,656.92)

5. The organization has maintained the accounts of the Foreign Donations in accordance with the Foreign Donation (Voluntary Activities) Regulations Act, 2016.
6. The information furnished above is correct and checked by us.

Dhaka

Date: 22.03.2021

Pinaki Das
Pinaki Das, FCA
Senior Partner

Pinaki & Company
Chartered Accountants

AHSANDELL, 2/A Mymensingh Road
(2nd Floor), Shahbag, Dhaka-1000.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF NEWS NETWORK

President

Shahriar Hossain, Ph. D

Vice-President

Kaiser Ali Talukder, Ph. D

Secretary General

Shahiduzzaman

Finance Secretary

Jalal Ahmed

Members

Rasada Akther

Sanchita Sharma

Taslima Tamanna



OUR AGENDA

- To promote freedom of expression, freedom of media, human rights and gender equality;
- To improve professional ability of journalists;
- To encourage young women to take up journalism as profession;
- To promote investigative journalism and ensure right to information;
- To promote safety and security of journalists;
- To promote activities relating to disaster management, climate change and environment;
- To sensitise media on crucial social issues including Right to Information Act, democracy, good governance, transparency and promoting access to justice;
- To support human rights defenders to protect and promote democracy, good governance, transparency and accountability;
- To motivate children and youths to make themselves as good citizens;
- To promote secularism, tolerance and peace in the society, and also the rights of ethnic and indigenous people of the country;
- To organise dialogues, seminars, workshops and discussion meeting on issues of national importance.

**NEWS
NETWORK**

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empowering people*

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