



# Collaborative Action for Freedom of Expression





## **Collaborative Action for Freedom of Expression**

The Collaborative Action for Freedom of Expression (CAFE), initiated by News Network and supported by Internews, is a timely and impactful project designed to tackle the pressing challenges of freedom of expression (FoE) in Bangladesh. This initiative focuses on understanding of FoE, strengthening digital security, legal safety and the capacity of journalists and civil society organizations (CSOs). By addressing these issues, CAFE aims to mitigate threats, enhance awareness and drive policy reforms essential for safeguarding FoE.

### **Why Freedom of Expression Matters**

FoE is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 39 of the Constitution of Bangladesh and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It includes:

- The right to speak, to be heard, and engage in public, political, and social life.
- The right to access, share, and seek information.
- Ensuring accountability and fostering a transparent, democratic society.

Despite these guarantees, Bangladesh faces challenges such as restrictive laws, limited awareness, and insufficient mobilization of journalists and CSOs to defend FoE effectively.

## **Project Objectives:**

The CAFE project focuses on:

1. Building collaboration between journalists and CSOs to advocate for and protect FoE.
2. Strengthening their capacity to address threats, document restrictions, and engage in advocacy for legal and policy reforms.
3. Enhancing digital and legal safety knowledge to mitigate risks and continue professional activities effectively.

The CAFE initiative outlines some specific and actionable steps to achieve its objectives of promoting and safeguarding freedom of expression in Bangladesh. These actions are carefully designed to address existing gaps in capacity, security and advocacy among journalists and civil society organizations (CSOs).

## **Major Actions of the Project**

### **1. Enhancing Journalists' Understanding and Skills**

- Objective: Equip journalists with the expertise to effectively report on FoE issues.
- Activities:
  - o Conduct workshops and training sessions focusing on FoE-related topics, including legal frameworks, investigative techniques and ethical reporting.
  - o Build journalists' confidence to cover sensitive issues while minimizing risks.

### **2. Supporting In-Depth Reporting through Small Grants**

- Objective: Encourage high-quality, impactful journalism on FoE issues.
- Activities:
  - o Provide small grants to select journalists trained under the program.
  - o Senior journalists will be appointed as mentors to guide the awardees while producing reports/articles.
  - o Reports will be published in media outlets to reach a wide audience.

### 3. Building Digital Security and Legal Safety Capacity

- Objective: Enhance the ability of CSOs, youth, and media personnel to protect themselves against digital and legal threats.
- Activities:
  - o Organize workshops on cybersecurity, including safe online communication, data protection, and countering surveillance.
  - o Train participants on legal rights and protections relevant to FoE.
  - o Provide resources and tools to help individuals and organizations to adopt secure practices in their work.

### 4. Conducting SAFETAG Audits

- Objective: Improve the digital and physical security of media outlets and CSOs.
- Activities:
  - o Perform Security Auditing Framework and Evaluating Technical Auditing Guidance (SAFETAG) assessments for selected organizations.
  - o Identify vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure and recommend tailored solutions.
  - o Implement safety protocols and strategies to reduce risks while working on FoE issues.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

These actions aim to create a robust ecosystem where:

- Journalists and CSOs are empowered to advocate for FoE with enhanced skills and safety.
- These in-depth and investigative reporting will bring more critical FoE issues to public attention sparking discourse and policy change.
- Organizations will operate in a more secure environment, reducing the risks associated with their work.

### **Anticipated Impact**

The CAFE project envisions:

- Enhanced professional skills and safety measures for journalists and CSOs.

- Increased public awareness of FoE and its societal benefits.
- Improved security for media professionals and activists.
- A foundation for sustainable advocacy to reform restrictive laws and strengthen democratic values in Bangladesh.

## **Transformative Vision**

News Network firmly believes that by addressing the critical challenges surrounding freedom of expression (FoE), the Collaborative Action for Freedom of Expression (CAFE) project will achieve more than just the protection of this fundamental right. It envisions a broader societal impact by fostering a culture of accountability, transparency, and resilience in Bangladesh.

Through its targeted actions—empowering journalists, strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs), enhancing digital and legal safety, and advocating for policy reforms—the project aspires to:

1. **Promote Accountability:**
  - o Empower citizens, journalists, and CSOs to hold authorities and institutions responsible for their actions.
  - o Enable informed and fearless reporting on governance, human rights, and social justice issues.
2. **Enhance Transparency:**
  - o Encourage open access to information by equipping media and CSOs with the skills to navigate restrictive environments.
  - o Generate public discourse around FoE, leading to more transparent decision-making processes.
3. **Build Resilience:**
  - o Strengthen the capacity of individuals and organizations to withstand threats and continue advocacy for their rights.
  - o Establish sustainable frameworks that will protect FoE and the individuals who champion it ensuring long-term impact.

By systematically addressing these interconnected issues, the CAFE project not only safeguards the right to freedom of expression but also catalyzes the development of a more inclusive and democratic society in Bangladesh.

Join us in championing the right to freedom of expression—a cornerstone for societal progress and human rights.



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