

MEDIACORPS WATCH REPORTING PROGRAM TO PROVIDE AUTHENTIC INFORMATION ON COVID-19

March 25 - April 07, 2020



MEDIA EMPOWERMENT FOR A DEMOCRATIC SRI LANKA (MEND) PROGRAM

MEDIACORPS WATCH REPORTING & NEWS MAGAZINE PROGRAM ON COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) and the Center for Media and Information Literacy (CMIL) started producing a series of daily reporting and news magazine programs on the Covid-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this news magazine, #MediaCorpsWatch is to show how people in various parts of Sri Lanka are coping with the present situation, while also providing them with vital and factual information around Covid 19.

Both SDJF and CMIL had observed how mainstream media in Sri Lanka was reporting on Covid 19 and realized that there was a vital need of put together an inclusive reports and news magazine to highlight how people in different parts of the country are dealing with the situation; how well their preparations to respond to this emergency situation at village level; what are real needs; challenges faced by people, as well as government authorities; and an analysis of significant false information (fake news) that is spreading around Covid-19.

As of **April 07**, SDJF has received **228 video** contents from **40 fellows**, which have contributed to **13 news magazine** episodes in both Sinhala and Tamil languages and mobilized **181K viewers** within a short span. The stories and the news magazines are accessible in social media using **#MediaCorpsWatch**

YOUNG MOBILE JOURNALISTS

SDJF, under its MediaCorps Fellowship Program, has already trained more than 100 young journalists across the country on mobile journalism (MoJo). With their participation, SDJF created a network of young professional mobile journalists. Under the present situation, SDJF invited those young journalists living across the country to produce stories that could contribute to the daily news magazine on the prevailing situation. Despite the lock-downs, regular curfews and practical challenges at least 40 journalists came forward together to support SDJF and CMIL to produce the news Magazine in both local languages.



MEDIACORPS WATCH REPORTING NEWS MAGAZINE

SDJF receives on an average 13 stories per day including feature stories, live updates, photo stories, small films; shot exclusively taken with smart phones. These stories have captured news from a cross section of Sri Lanka, spanning up to 16 districts. SDJF and CMIL teams work through day and night in helping the young mobile journalists to identify stories, verifying the facts, providing editorial directions, and other additional guidelines.

DISSEMINATION

The Tamil news magazine is disseminated through a popular Tamil media channel UTV, while the Sinhala magazine is disseminated through more than 22 social media platforms. In addition, SDJF and CMIL have also developed MediaCorps Watch - a dedicated Facebook page to disseminate stories and the news magazines. The initial evaluations show that the stories have so far reached 181K as of April 07.

Details of social media platforms that disseminated the news magazine





SITUATION UPDATES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

Majority of the stories produced are highlighting the challenges faced by the people in various parts of Sri Lanka and the services available to the people through the government and other organizations. Some examples of stories captured in the episodes are given below.

- Young Mobile Journalist Aathif Arifeen and Mursith Mohamed (MC 2019/20) have been sending us updates from Ampara District. [Magazine #12 & 15]
- Pararasasingham Kanicious sent updates from Vavuniya District, particularly the news from quarantine centers. [Magazine #15]
- Manushi Jayasekara constantly reported issues faced by the people from Southern Province (Matara) who did not receive adequate drinking water. [Magazine #12 & 14]
- Young MediaCorps Fellow Mohammed Asath reported from Horowpothana, highlighting issues faced by the farmers without being able to sell their vegetable produce. [Magazine #15]
- Jaffna mobile journalists Sumathi and Vimal Raj have been producing stories about the lockdown situation in their region. [Magazine #1]



COUNTERING FAKE NEWS

Link: <https://cutt.ly/btVkksc>

One of the core segments of the news magazine is about Fake News and False Information. SDJF mobile journalists and the CMIL production team observed a large amount of false information, dis-mis- and mal-information about Covid-19. Through its **#NoFake** segment in the news magazine several detrimental fake news was clarified. CMIL presenters continued to educate people as to how to verify information and critically consume media content on Covid-19. An example of a fake news spreading that was countered is as follows;

There was a social media post in social media that requested every citizen to remain indoors on the night of March 26, since the Sri Lankan Air Force will be dispersing disinfectants using helicopters. The #NoFake segment proved this post to be fake, by citing the official announcement by the Department of Government Information. It was also highlighted in the segment, the need to verify doubtful news received using an authentic source. [Magazine #3]

EMERGENCY PREPARATIONS & HEALTHCARE SERVICES

SDJF mobile journalists have played a remarkable role in highlighting the emergency requirements of the people under the constant curfew and travel restrictions. The healthcare sector is working tirelessly to mitigate the spread of the virus and its infections. SDJF mobile journalists produced a number of stories highlighting healthcare requirements and on the importance of social distancing.

In a recent magazine, we revealed the plight of a group of laborers trapped at a construction site in Colombo, who were unable to return to their homes. When this episode was telecast, several other groups facing the same situation, also reached us via phones to share their issues. As a result, this story was followed up until the police initiated a survey to collect details of such temporarily displaced individuals in Colombo. The police have stated that once the survey is completed a suitable means of sending these people to their respective hometowns will be arranged. [Magazine #15]



EXPERT INTERVIEWS

With loads of mundane news being shared by various media, there are less opportunities for citizens to obtain factual and verified information. This segment is dedicated for experts who share their expert knowledge on topics related to Covid-19.

e.g.

When the body of a Muslim man who died of Covid-19 was cremated against their traditional practice of burial, it set an uproar in social media with various claims made on this act. As a result, a very comprehensive interview was conducted with the Chief Medical Officer of Colombo Municipal Council, where he explained the scientific grounds of disposing the body of a dead due to Covid-19. This episode is the most viewed and shared Episode to date with over 37K views and 150 shares in Facebook. [Magazine # 9]



STORIES OF HUMAN INTEREST

This is the type of stories that MC fellows are most encouraged to send, since they are rarely covered by the mainstream media. These stories include feature stories on how Covid-19 has affected certain communities financially and socially.

e.g.

- Young Mobile Journalist Shabeer Mohammed covered such stories from Avissawella. The story of an old man who home delivers gas cylinders, considering it a service at a stressful time, ignoring his own vulnerability to the disease. This story was picked by another news platform that shared the story in their Facebook page [Magazine #5] and other story of staff of the Suwaseriya pre-hospital care ambulance service, which is performing a pivotal role these days [Magazine #11]
- Najumudeen Ashath produced a story of a home for differently abled children in Anuradhapura, and their difficulties in getting supplies during this period [Magazine #10]
- Kamali Dedigama produced a feature story that shows the importance of home gardening, both financially and psychologically during the self-isolation period as a means of obtaining fresh vegetables and fruits without having to rely on inorganic vegetables and fruits in the market. [Magazine #13]
- Prasad Poornimal in his story compiled success stories of various people who have gone the extra mile to help fight the Covid-19 from Puttlam District. He tells the story of PHIs who have donated their one day's salary to the Covid-19 fund, a girl who sews safety clothes for doctors, police and other service providers, and a man who has developed a handwashing set-up that works by foot, to avoid direct contact with the tap or the soap dispenser. [Magazine #15]

BUILDING CAPACITY OF YOUNG MOBILE JOURNALISTS

SDJF developed a reporting guideline giving the scope of the stories, DOs and DON'Ts, and FAQs related to the program. It was translated into both local languages and circulated among the MC fellows.

SDJF also organized a virtual training for the selected MC fellow network members. The initial training was done jointly by SDJF and CMIL to orient about the MediaCorps Watch program, its format and other guidelines.

After a week of collaboration with IREX and DATA LEADS in India, SDJF organized a webinar to all the selected fellows on 'How to report Covid-19 stories'. IREX has already prepared a tips sheet for journalists in Sri Lanka, in all three languages and was widely shared with the MC fellows.

TYPE OF STORIES

DAILY UPDATES 88

**EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS 03**

EXPERT TALK 11

NO FAKE NEWS 04

MOJO STORIES 21

TOTAL 127



FACILITATION OF REPORTING

Since the country is under a prolonged curfew, the mobility is restricted for collecting information and news by the fellows. However, the police spokesperson mentioned that Media organizations and journalists can use their official ID cards as curfew passes. Firstly, SDJF issued a letter to all the selected fellows to facilitate their mobility within their localities in collecting news. In the meantime, SDJF is planning to issue official ID cards to the fellow members. In addition, most of the fellow members also carry their official journalist ID cards issued by their respective media houses. Therefore, we did not face much challenges in collecting news from across the country.

REGULAR MENTORSHIP

SDJF also nominated 3 dedicated mentors to support and assist MC fellows, when they need any technical support, story ideas and to discuss about their challenges in the field. Each mentor was allocated with a certain number of fellow members to mentor and guide.

HEALTH AND SECURITY THREATS

SDJF is very much sensitive and places an utmost importance on the health and security of the fellow members. In our guidelines SDJF stressed that, the fellows who are involved in this project should adhere to the guidance and instructions issued by the health authorities from time to time. They are instructed to wear facemasks at all times and did not authorize to cover any crisis situation during this program. “No story is worth than your life”, is our moto during this program.



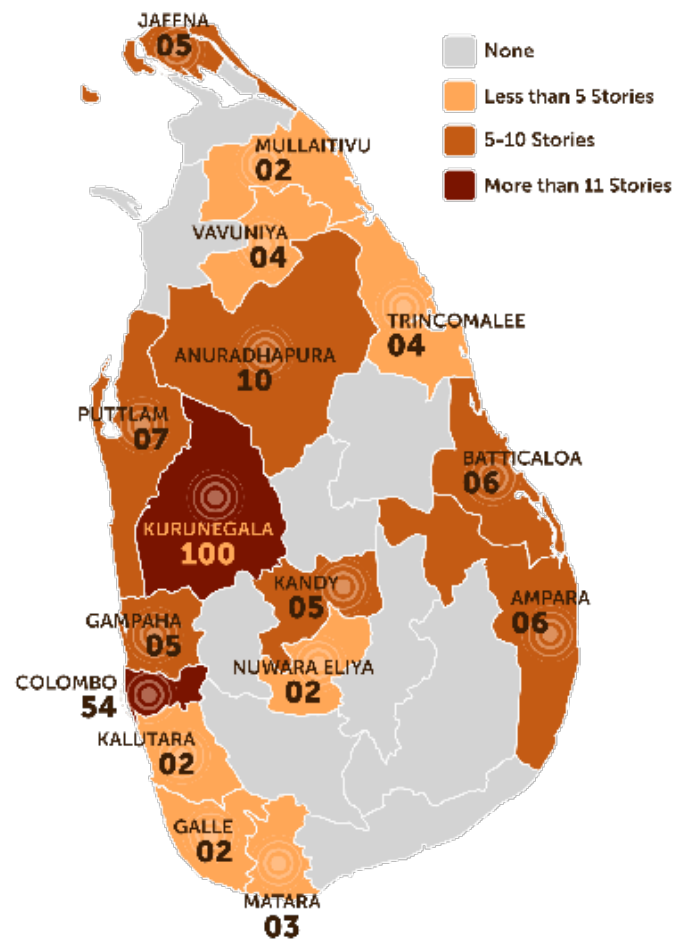
**Manjula Samarasekara
Colombo**

IMPACTS OF THE PROGRAM

- The news magazine program succeeded in attracting 23 social media platforms and was widely disseminated through these platforms, along with more than 181K reach within a short span.
- SDJF and CMIL received a dedicated air time from a popular Tamil national television UTV to telecast this news magazine program after their prime-time news in every other day.
- The gas mama story telecasted through MediaCorps Watch program was picked up by YouJudge.lk which has more than 60K viewers with the credit to our program.
- Two MC fellows Mr. Shabeer Mohammed got new job at Swarnavahini, A Sinhala national television as a correspondent to Avissawala and Ahallya David likely to get an opportunity in the Tamil channel as a news reader.
- Our trained Fellow from Jaffna Mr. Alexander Kamilas had one hour live interview from doctors in Jaffna focusing health and preventive measures on Covid 19 which was aired on “PAHALAVAN TV” – A satellite Tamil Channel.
- A fellow from Kurunegala Mr. Mohamed Faslan has produced more than 100 video contents for the news magazine in the last 14 days.
- Nirasha Piyawadani is one of the MC fellow and Member of CMIL captured a story about a beggar lady from Eastern province trapped in Colombo due to curfew. The story was aired by the UTV attracted a like-minded group. Consequently, the TV channel received a call from Dehiwala area and informed there are more than 8 persons from Upcountry trapped in a construction site due to curfew. SDJF/CMIL decided to do a story on this issue. Accordingly, Nirasha visited the place and talked with laborers and produced a story. The story was aired in both Tamil and Sinhala. After the program, CMIL received calls from similar type of issues around Colombo. So, we decided to take this issue with responsible stakeholders. Nirasha contacted OIC of Mt. Lavaniya and Police media spoke person and informed about this situation. She also contacted Dr. Ruwan Wijeyamuni, Chief Medical Officer of Mucicipal Council of Colombo and Grama Niladari of the division. Eventually, the government has introduced a mechanism to register temporary inmates who trapped in Colombo due to Curfew and police will take necessary arrangements to send them to their own home town. In the meantime, the well-wishers who saw the program donated dry rations to those who were trapped in Dehiwala and RDHS

promised to look after their medical needs assigning a Public Health Inspector to look after them.

- SDJF MC fellow Asiri Upendara received an exclusive video from a Sri Lankan in Iranian oil purifying company, requesting to His Excellency President to rescue him from there to Sri Lanka after watching our program.
- Considering the request and demands from the viewers on fake news, CMIL hosted a Facebook live program with Mr. Senel Wanniarachi, Hashtag generation, with a reach more than 10K.



Story Productions details by District



MediaCorps Watch

On Covid 19 Pandemic

The telecasted news magazine and stories can be accessed via the below links.

Magazine #01 | <http://tiny.cc/fw25lz>

Magazine #02 | <http://tiny.cc/5u25lz>

Magazine #03 | <http://tiny.cc/rt25lz>

Magazine #04 | <http://tiny.cc/cr25lz>

Magazine #05 | <http://tiny.cc/xe05lz>

Magazine #06 | <http://tiny.cc/ger8lz>

Magazine #07 | <http://tiny.cc/ob28lz>

Magazine #08 | <http://tiny.cc/b9ccmz>

Magazine #09 | <http://tiny.cc/7hkdmz>

Magazine #10 | <http://tiny.cc/8kpmmz>

Magazine #11 | <http://tiny.cc/li3hmz>

Magazine #12 | <http://tiny.cc/antkmz>

Magazine #13 | <http://tiny.cc/3jzmmz>

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

1. Prof. Padmasiri Wanigasundera
2. Mohamed Azad
3. Ruwan Bogamuwa
4. Hasarel Gallage
5. Geethma Weerasuriya
6. Nirasha Piyawadani
7. Isbhan Sharifdeen

HOW TO JOIN ?

If you are a MediaCorps fellow, then you can join this program simply send your stories to mediacorpsswatch@gmail.com or contact

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