

Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity Through Mobile Journalism



Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum | **NEWSLETTER**

EDITORIAL COLUMN

Diversity that drives innovation and strength, can lead to inspiration and transformation of societies for the betterment of its people. The perception of diversity at times is narrowed down to culture, ethnicity, or gender. However, diversity is not limited to the background a person comes from, but everything that encompasses in making them the unique individual that they are. Today, it is very unlikely of people, not to interact with others outside their native groups or communities. It is observed that this diversity is more represented in our working environments, businesses, schools, media, etc, which we stand to benefit as individuals and as a global society.

Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF), as a development organisation embraces diversity, and this phenomenon is reflected through different tasks we venture upon. The multifarious organisations, communities and people representing different backgrounds such as academic professionals and scientists

from universities, higher education institutions, and research and development organizations and the marginalised communities that SDJF work with, is a testimony of its inclination towards acceptance and inclusivity of all people. Notwithstanding this, we promote peace and reconciliation, to further cultivate a sense of understanding of different communities and raise awareness on the raging problems of the ordinary people regardless of their caste, creed and ethnicity through a solid network of young journalists across the country, trained and coached by us.

It is no doubt that diversity has enriched our programs and will continue to be so, enriching in turn the lives of many people we collaborate with.

**“Strength lies in differences
not in similarities.”**
-Stephen Covey

BRIEF UPDATE OF OUR CURRENT PROJECTS

MEDIA EMPOWERMENT FOR A DEMOCRATIC SRI LANKA (MEND) PROGRAM

The Media Empowerment for a Democratic Sri Lanka (MEND) program is an intervention to support and facilitate media transformation that can empower Sri Lanka's democratic values and right to information of citizens.

MOBILE STORYTELLING IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR LGBTIQ+ COMMUNITY TO AMPLIFY THEIR VOICE IN SRI LANKA

“Now I have more recognition and voice for LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka”

said Adhil Suraj one of the participants of the Vibrant Voices program, which was launched recently. 24 participants representing 8 organizations working for marginalised communities, LGBTIQ+ and women across the country received 5 days intensive training on Mobile Journalism and Digital Advocacy by the experts in the field. The Vibrant Voices is a program designed by SDJF in partnership with IREX and supported by USAID, since 2018.

“I used to write articles for newspapers and websites to raise the voice for issues and concerns of LGBTIQ+ community but hardly received any recognition or response. However, I had an opportunity to participate in the VV program to learn the new media tool called ‘mobile journalism’ (MoJo) and I realised that this is more powerful than my previous write up. Also, I realised that with this new tool, I can address a large audience with videos, I can bring some light to our darkness through the MoJo. I really want to thank SDJF for organizing this valuable training for organizations like us”

added Adhil in a private interview with SDJF.

After one - two months of the training program he has produced 4 video documentaries and stories and 2 photo campaigns as detailed below;



1. Produced one MoJo and submitted it to the international contest called “Ubuntu Symposium”. The theme of the MoJo is “Men and masculinity in the Sri Lankan context”. This will be published once the contest has ended.
2. An awareness video by Adhil about [AIDS](#), which was approved by the Health Ministry, is now being used as a tool for their youth workshops in the country.



- Adhil published his 2 stories ([Story 01](#), [Story 02](#)) for the program 'Men engage in alliance of Sri Lanka', for which he received a remarkable reach via social media.

As a community activist, Adhil has submitted these two videos for their social media campaign.

- Adhil provided photos for a myth busting social media campaign, which focused on LGBTIQ+ issues. These photos were being captured by the toolkit given by the Vibrant Voices program.

"I am representing the LGBTIQ+ community and there are not many videos in Sinhala that highlight the issues about our community. Therefore, I am very proud that this knowledge I received from the VV program has given me an opportunity to cater good content to my community and raise awareness among people. Now, I have been identified as a content creator for digital media" says Adhil. He has identified how powerful videos can be and how beneficial they can be for his community. "There are so many interviews on mainstream media related to LGBTIQ+ community, yet most mainstream media change them the way they want to report and the truth doesn't go out, the way our community needs. With the knowledge I received via the VV program, I can bring out the real voice and truth about the LGBTIQ+ community" added Adhil.

Being a voice for diverse groups and marginalised communities is crucial, given the noticeable gap that exists in Sri Lanka. SDJF strives towards narrowing down this gap through its Vibrant Voices program and widen the media space for them, through mobile storytelling.

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation"

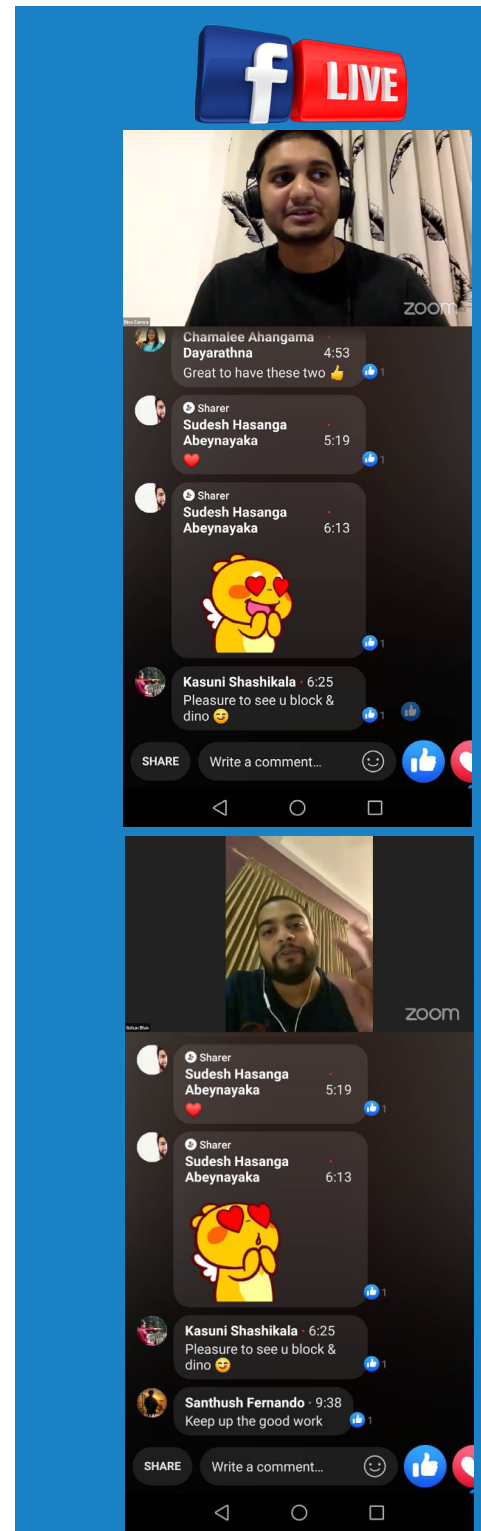
PROMOTING GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING IN MEDIA

Isn't it more of a pull-out-the-stops moment for Media Gender Charter? The fourth #Media4Everyone live discussion, "Gender-sensitive media content, SOWHAT?" gave a kick start beginning with the resemblance of the award-winning content creators, Blok and Dino! It was held on November 15, 2020 from 6.00 pm to 7.00 pm via Zoom & Facebook live. The discussion provided a unique platform to indulge in a timely interaction on what gender-sensitive media content is about and its importance. The moderator, Gender & Women's Rights Consultant, Sharanya Sekaram steered the discussion to reveal the significant responsibility of the media to accurately mirror our societies, and to produce coverage that is complete and gender neutral. Nearly 30 participants joined via Zoom and their enthusiasm to interact and discuss more about the topic showed that the discussion was well thought through and executed. There were 10 watch parties hosted! It was interesting to note that the discussion was not just a wine & cheese thing, since there were 2800 views, 6151 reaches, 1212 engagements and 19 constructive comments through Facebook.

After an insightful and an enjoyable evening, Blok & Dino concluded the discussion by saying that sensationalism is not the only way to get a message across the media and every media outlet should get this seriously by thinking it is their responsibility to project gender-fair media content. They also added,

"Thank you SDJF for organizing such an insightful discussion going beyond usual surface style discussions. We could unpack significant insights on this timely topic; gender sensitivity in the media content"

The FB live discussions were organised as a part of the Media Gender Charter program- A policy document to promote gender equality within the media houses, addressing the sexual harassment and promoting gender sensitive reporting in Sri Lanka. The charter will be launched soon.



EXPLORING DIVERSE CULTURES OF SRI LANKA DIGITALLY UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

The growing risk of the Covid-19 virus has not stopped our enthusiastic cohort of MediaCorps Fellows from exploring diverse cultures and reporting the stories on the ground. At a time, they can't go out, Fellows are now planning to meet each other online, through several virtual tours. This would be the first time MediaCorps field visits are happening entirely virtually. In these virtual tours, Fellows will introduce their families, their daily routines, cultural foods, religious practices and the burning issues of their communities in order to give their partner a vivid picture of the host community.

In the meantime, we are also getting ready to start the second intake of the MediaCorps Extended Fellowship Program for Undergraduates. 25 undergraduates following a variety of subjects from mass communication to medicine have thus flocked together for the second intake of the Fellowship. But this time the Fellowship training takes up a different face, adapting to the current situation, that is the training will largely be conducted virtually. Despite the challenges imposed by the pandemic, we are determined to give the authentic MediaCorps experience to our fresh group of MediaCorps Fellows because we believe peace and coexistence is a priority, which cannot be delayed and that it is at times like these that coexistence matters more and can be most useful if we are to defeat the common challenge of the pandemic.

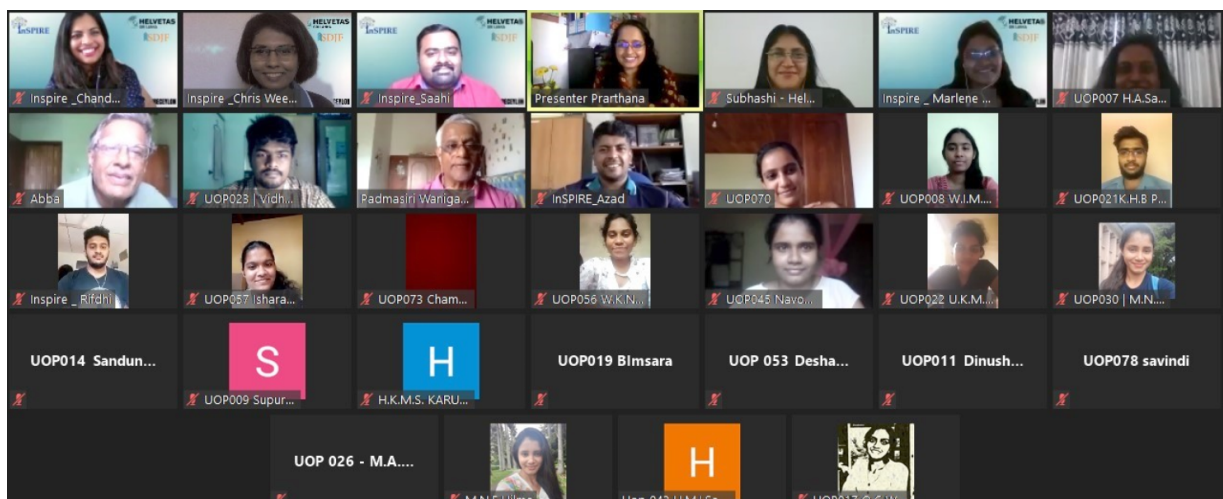
I AM A RESPONSIBLE MEDIA CITIZEN - A CAMPAIGN FOR CREATING A COMMUNITY OF YOUTH IN THE STATE UNIVERSITIES.

"I hope this InSPIRE center will facilitate more programmes of this nature, to engage the university youth so that they can add value to their undergraduate profiles in a variety of dimensions."

- Dr. G. Pushpakumara, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya.

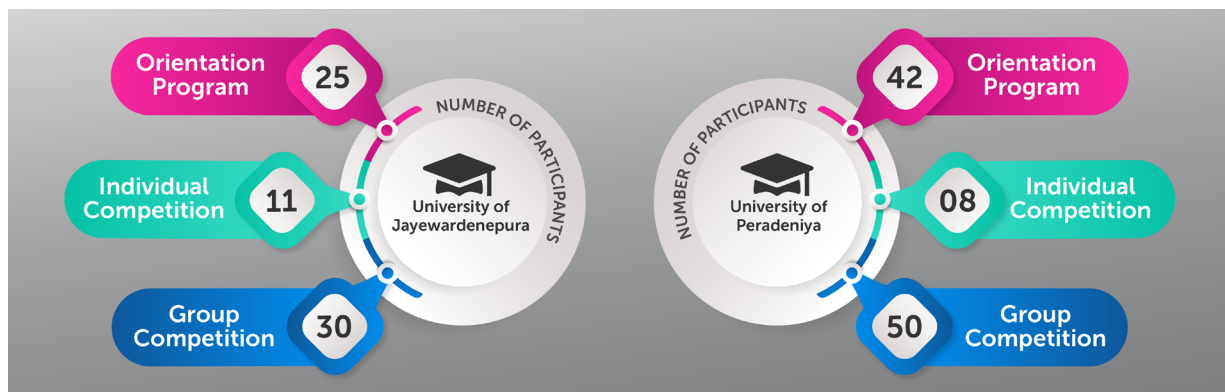
"This is the first ever program that was conducted for us by an external organisation during our stay in the university for the past 3 years."

- Samadi Sandhyani, University of Jayewardenepura.



The wait is no more! The InSPIRE project has finally broken free of its manacles to connect with its ambitious future media professionals through the successful completion of 2 Orientation programs followed by a 3-day online competition on, "I Am a Responsible Media Citizen", for the undergraduates studying Mass Media & Communication studies of the Universities of Peradeniya and Sri Jayewardenepura. The program was held from November 21-28, 2020. In total there were 67 participants for the orientation from both Universities, 19 entries for the individual competition and 80 for the group competition.

The students gained exposure to exciting and engaging activities carried out via the InSPIRE Facebook page and WhatsApp groups. They were required to exhibit their creative expressions through a selfie, photo, video, cartoon, doodle or caption on a variety of thematic areas such as Civic Activism, Right to Information, Digital citizenship and Media ethics, Freedom of expression, Covid-19 and Fake-news/discrimination.



The intensity and enthusiasm were real. The participants showcased great team spirits and commitment throughout the competitions. There were 8 individual participants and 10 groups (5 members each) from the University of Peradeniya and 11 individual contestants and 6 groups from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura who participated in the competitions. The students joined the virtual zoom orientation

session with much anticipation and glee on day 4 to experience the triumphant moment much awaited. Distinguished guests from the Universities and representatives from both SDJF and HELVETAS participated in the final day programs. Finally, to much of everyone's ovation and delight, the winners walked away with rewarding prizes. This endeavour ignited the flames of hope for greater opportunities to come.

RESPONSIBLE MEDIA CITIZENS

Here are the 2 winners of the InSPIRE online competition "I Am a Responsible Media Citizen", held for the Universities of Peradeniya and Sri Jayewardenepura. These emerging talents were recognised from their creative work at the individual contest. Vidheesha Abeysinghe, from the University of Peradeniya produced an inspirational video capturing the importance of the Right to Information based on the Covid-19 context, whereas, Dilanka Lakmal, from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura exhibited his creativity through a fine piece of artwork, based on a broader theme; Women and Media. These creations reflect the indefinite potential skills these young talents carry.



Dilanka Lakmal

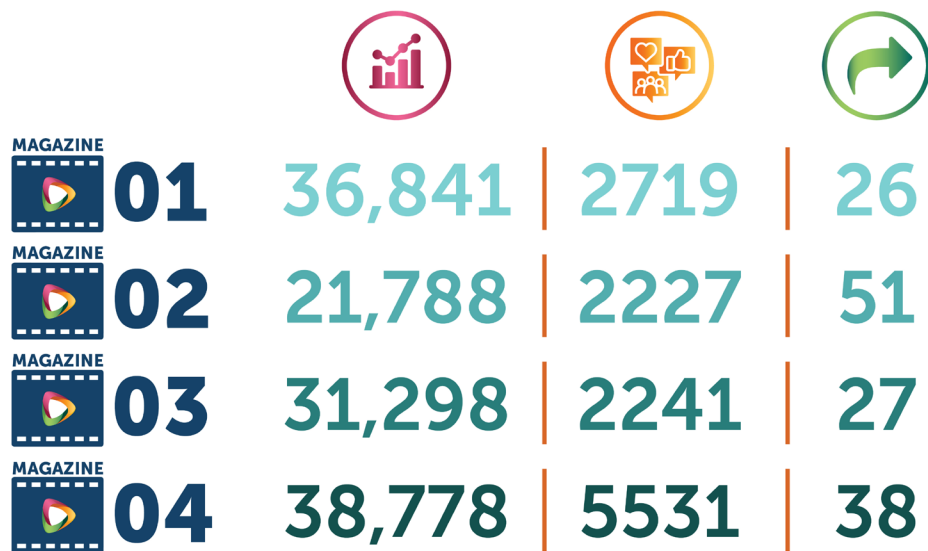


Vidheesha Abeysinghe

FACING THE PANDEMIC WITH CRITICAL INFORMATION

MediaCorps Watch kick started its fourth phase focusing on the re-emerging threat of the coronavirus. In Phase 4 we will be exploring the new realities of the impact of the virus on the country by reaching out to more communities and learning how they are responding to the 'new normal'.

Phase four will feature weekly magazines in Sinhala and Tamil, presenting an array of stories produced and presented by MediaCorps Fellows. In this phase we have also added a new segment 'Impact Stories', dedicated to the positive impacts the MediaCorps Watch reporters have been successful in creating, through their stories. In our first magazine, we brought the story of Siriyalatha, a courageous woman who despite her skill to weave magnificent reed mats, had no buyers or demand for her products. When the story was aired in the MediaCorps Watch Magazine, there was an overwhelming response with viewers requesting to buy her mats. There was also somebody who promised to support her with exporting mats to Europe. Siriyalatha's life drastically transformed afterwards. With an increasing number of requests for her mats, she has even employed a few more women from her own community to assist her. Thanks to an appealing MoJo story, not just one courageous woman but an entire community of women have been empowered and given a hope.



Have you watched its first four magazines? (Magazine 1, 2, 3, 4)



MEDIACORPS FELLOWS OF THE MONTH



Prabasha Charithangi

A MediaCorps Fellow and a prolific journalist in making, Prabasha is from the University of Sri Jayawardenapura specializing in media and communication studies. She has been a major contributor to the MediaCorps Watch, since its first phase in early this year. Recently Prabasha achieved another success by creating an impact through a story. The [sensitive story](#) of the hearing-impaired child from Monaragala that she did for the MediaCorps Watch program's [magazine #1](#) heaved the heart of its viewers who offered to support the child to repair his hearing aid. A philanthropic organization based in Uva Province named 'Wellasse Handa' has agreed to support the child's needs with contributions from willing donors. As a result, the child who has been living a very hard life without the support of his hearing aid will soon have the device repaired, allowing him to hear things from around the world again!! Prabasha's story reminds us of the positive change and inspiration a journalist could bring through an impactful story.



Roshan Gunasekara

On November 27, Roshan Gunasekara, a MediaCorps Fellow from Hambanthota reported a [heart-warming story](#) of the homeless family of Ranjith Wasantha in Weniwel-ara, Sooriyawewa, who was residing in a weekly market complex in Sooriyawewa (MediaCorps Watch [Magazine #4](#)). The family of three was living in this shack having nowhere else to go. Roshan's story captured the plight of this poor family of father and mother out of work and their effort to educate their only daughter, despite their destituteness. After the story was aired in the News Magazine the family was offered help by an individual donor with shelter in a house on rent, while preparations are being made by the Ministry of Rural Housing and Construction & Building Materials Industries Promotion, to build a permanent house. At present, a piece of land is being prepared for the laying of the foundation stone.

JOIN US

Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) is a non-governmental organization that promotes democracy, rule of law, governance, peace and reconciliation, gender equality and justice through creative media products, training, research and advocacy, across the country. For more information please visit us www.Ldjf.org and follow us:



Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum

No.3/8, Swarna Place, Nawala Road, Rajagiriya, Sri Lanka.

011 280 62 65 | info@Ldjf.org | www.Ldjf.org



/sdjf



@sdjf



/sdjf



sdjf_lk