

# ENHANCING THE LIVES OF THE EXCLUDED WITH NEW MEDIA

DECEMBER, 2020



Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum | NEWS LETTER

## EDITORIAL COLUMN

The year 2020 has been a battling ground for many having had to grapple with the deadly pandemic known as the CoronaVirus, which is of no mystic to any. The magnitude of this very pandemic is such that it remains a growing cancer to date, devouring the lives of millions of people around the globe. Under this raging turmoil, many communities and fractions in society have been affected socially, economically and psychologically at numerous fronts to say the least. Being a source of strength to the marginalized and voiceless, Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) has shown great resilience at this point in time, fulfilling the role of a responsible media organization, remaining true to its values of Diversity, Sensitivity to conflict, Gender equality and Learning.

Diversity and inclusion remain at the center of what we do, and is reflected through the Vibrant Voices program, an initiative that has empowered organizations working for marginalized including Women, LGBTIQ+ and other excluded fragments in the country.

Despite the obstacles in reaching out to these dejected groups, SDJF has instilled new hope in their lives, providing them with essential tools and techniques especially through Mobile journalism to vocalize and project their issues to a larger audience.

Breaking the conventional barriers set by culture and ethnicity, the MediaCorps program has opened avenues to young journalists and undergraduates of universities to experience the diversity of different communities, while identifying and being sensitive to their differences and problems through peace journalism. This initiative has undoubtedly created a network of over 100 rural journalists to capture the struggles of people in these settings.

Considering the growing numbers of gender discrimination, gender insensitive reporting, stereotyping and biased treatment within media institutions, SDJF having initiated dialogue with various stakeholders namely media experts, researchers, academics, CSOs, regional editors and journalists etc.

produced a Media Gender Charter as a guiding tool to be utilized by media institutions in the country, which is due to be launched soon.

As we tread forward, we welcome new opportunities and continue to create innovative spaces for novel learning endeavors. So is it with the InSPIRE Project, that has set motion to establish 3 Incubator Spaces within

3 local universities to promote information rights and freedom of expression of 350 emerging journalists.

Marking the end of another eventful and challenging year, SDJF seeks to continue its mission for a democratic and just media through its unwavering perseverance to create remarkable and monumental results for the greater benefit of the country.

## BRIEF UPDATE OF OUR CURRENT PROJECTS

### MEDIA EMPOWERMENT FOR A DEMOCRATIC SRI LANKA (MEND) PROGRAM

#### PROMOTING GENDER SENSITIVE REPORTING IN MEDIA THE MEDIA GENDER CHARTER



“Cyber GBV - Just because it’s virtual doesn’t make it any less real!”

- Paba Deshapriya -

SDJF kicked off the last #Media4Everyone **live discussion** for 2020 on December 20 from 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm via Zoom and Facebook live. The discussion titled **“Cyber Gender-Based Violence: A ‘silent epidemic’ faced by women and girls in Sri Lanka?”** was a wake-up call for all those who joined in order to explore remedies and widen awareness about cyber violence against women and girls. The speaker of the discussion was Paba Deshapriya, Director of Grassrooted Trust while Nethmini Medawala, Attorney-At-Law was the moderator.

From women to the LGBTIQ community, the online spaces and especially social media in Sri Lanka have turned out to a hotbed of hostility and harassment. **“There are a lot of challenges to show that online GBV prevails and it mostly lies on power imbalance and behavioural patterns”** stated Paba by drawing implications as to why cyber SGBV is generalized and treated trivially even by the decision-making bodies of Sri Lanka.

By differentiating ground and online violence, Paba briefed the audience that ground violence against women is akin to the tip of an iceberg, known and visible to the minds of people. It is easy to identify and combat, whereas online violence is complex in nature. The keenness of the audience regarding the topic was prevalent through the active engagement of the audience and constant questions posed by them to the speaker.

**“Let’s not demonize the internet. There is no proper conversation about cyber SGBV. We always focus on regulations rather than addressing the human behaviour and inculcating values such as respect, empathy, trust and conversation around consent.”**

At the end of an interactive discussion, the audience on Zoom as well as Facebook thanked SDJF for organizing the December live discussion on a timely topic that everyone needs awareness on. SDJF received 1600 views, 1500 engagements, 60 likes, 12 shares and 11 constructive comments via Facebook during the live streaming.

**“As a social researcher in cybercrime and prevention, creating awareness among the public is the most pragmatic step at this stage. Thank you SDJF for initiating it to create a meaningful yet engaging conversation on cyber SGBV which is a new concept for all of us”** stated Prarthana Maduwanthi, a participant at the end of the discussion.



Live Discussion  



## THE FIRST SRI LANKAN DEAF FEMALE REPORTER THE VIBRANT VOICES PROGRAM

Sri Lanka's first ever sign language female reporter Ms.Suranga Udari placed her name in the history of Sri Lanka reporting an emerging environmental issue of the improper **disposal of used facemask** in Hikkaduwa beach area through sign language, in the district of Galle. It is interesting to note that she was trained under the **Vibrant Voices program** which was held by SDJF with the help of IREX and USAID.



Suranga udari(left), Brayan Kodithuwakku (Middle), Kirshnika Kumaraveloopillai (right), three deafparticipants in the Vibrant Voices program

In her story she focuses on how disposable masks cause a littering problem in one of the tourist attraction hubs in down south, Hikkaduwa and stresses that it is the responsibility of every individual to protect the environment and specially that this will be a threat to fishes, sea turtles and corals. However, this is a historical moment and a great achievement for the deaf community as they have so many burning issues that are not being reported properly in mainstream media.



Suranga Udari:

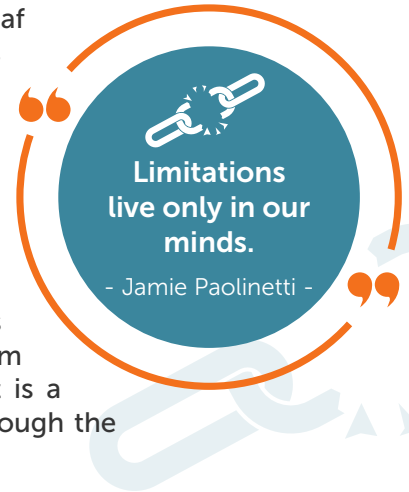
The first female deaf reporter  
in Sri Lanka

**"I never had an experience in making videos, I would like to extend my gratitude to SDJF. It was difficult at the beginning, yet with time I was able to pick up the skill fast, with the immense help of SDJF and their mentors. I had some experience in photography, I believe, that might have helped me in this situation as well. This knowledge is very useful to bring light to the deaf community in unveiling the hidden problems of them" signed, Suranga.**

Brayan Kodithuwakku the president of SLCFD asserted that it is a great achievement for the deaf community, as it has its first deaf reporter and more importantly, the first deafreporter being a female. It is an honor for the community.

**"Actually, I am thankful to SDJF for this opportunity as they believed that the deaf community could do this and also gave us this opportunity to participate. Moreover, the mentors and the SDJF staff paid close attention to deaf participants to make the learning process smooth, since there was a lot of new technological knowledge we had to grasp" Brayan added.**

Accessibility to information is vital and there is hope for the deaf community in Sri Lanka to take their next step with this incredible turning point. It is indeed remarkable to see the first deaf reporter being a female as there are separate issues deaf women have to deal with. Reporting on its own seems a daunting task and Suranga brought a glimpse of hope for the deaf community. She will be a role model for many young deaf people. On the other side, the mainstream media fails when they do not make their media accessible to reporters with hearing impairment and reporters with other disabilities. It is high time for mainstream media to consider taking reporters from disable communities to bring the real stories into the fore. It is a happy moment for SDJF as the first deaf reporter emerged through the Vibrant Voices program.



## **EXPLORING DIVERSE CULTURES OF SRI LANKA DIGITALLY UNDER THE NEW NORMAL THE MEDIACORPS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

In the last newsletter, we were excited to announce that MediaCorps Fellows will be having their field visits virtually. In December, most of the Fellows completed their virtual field tours by connecting with their MediaCorps partners online and introducing them to their families and communities. Despite the distance between each other in the virtual space, they explained each other of their unique cultural practices, food habits, religions and beliefs and took them around their villages to show them the landmarks and places of historical and cultural significance. Although they were unable to be a part of this experience physically, Fellows learnt an important lesson in this process.

They learnt that there was hardly any difference between their diverse cultures and that they were more or less following the same practices. MediaCorps Fellows Koshala Gunawardena from Sooriyawewa, Hambanthota and Baskaran Katheeshan from Batticaloa, shared an emotional moment during their virtual tour where they both acknowledged that their Sinhala and Tamil communities shared a lot in common.

**“This visit allowed us to see each other’s cultures in depth, to meet our families and discuss our cultures. At the end of the visit, we realized that we both our cultures were more similar than not. I think this understanding is where reconciliation shall be born”, says Koshala.**

**“After the virtual visit my interest to learn more about the Sinhala community grew. Once the risk of the pandemic alleviates, I can’t wait to visit Koshala in person and see all what I have seen virtually, for real”, adds Baskaran.**

More similar visits are on its way in the coming months, and we are anticipating to share with you more stories from Fellows about their virtual visits in the upcoming issues of the Newsletter.

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

Overcoming all obstacles, the InSPIRE team successfully conducted the third and final programme of their virtual competition and orientation series **"I Am a Responsible Media Citizen"**, from 2 -5 December with the participation of students from the Department of Media Studies, University of Jaffna. Demonstrating their unprecedented enthusiasm, **33** students competed in the individual competition and **105** in the group competition while **69** of them joined the orientation.

Throughout the 3-day competition, students were introduced to fun and stimulating events on the InSPIRE Facebook page and the WhatsApp groups where they were given the opportunity to exhibit their creative expressions through selfie, photos, videos, cartoons, doodles or captions. These games were aligned under a diverse range of thematic areas such as Civic Activism, Right to Information, Digital Citizenship and Media Ethics, Freedom of Expression, Covid-19 related Fake News and Discrimination.



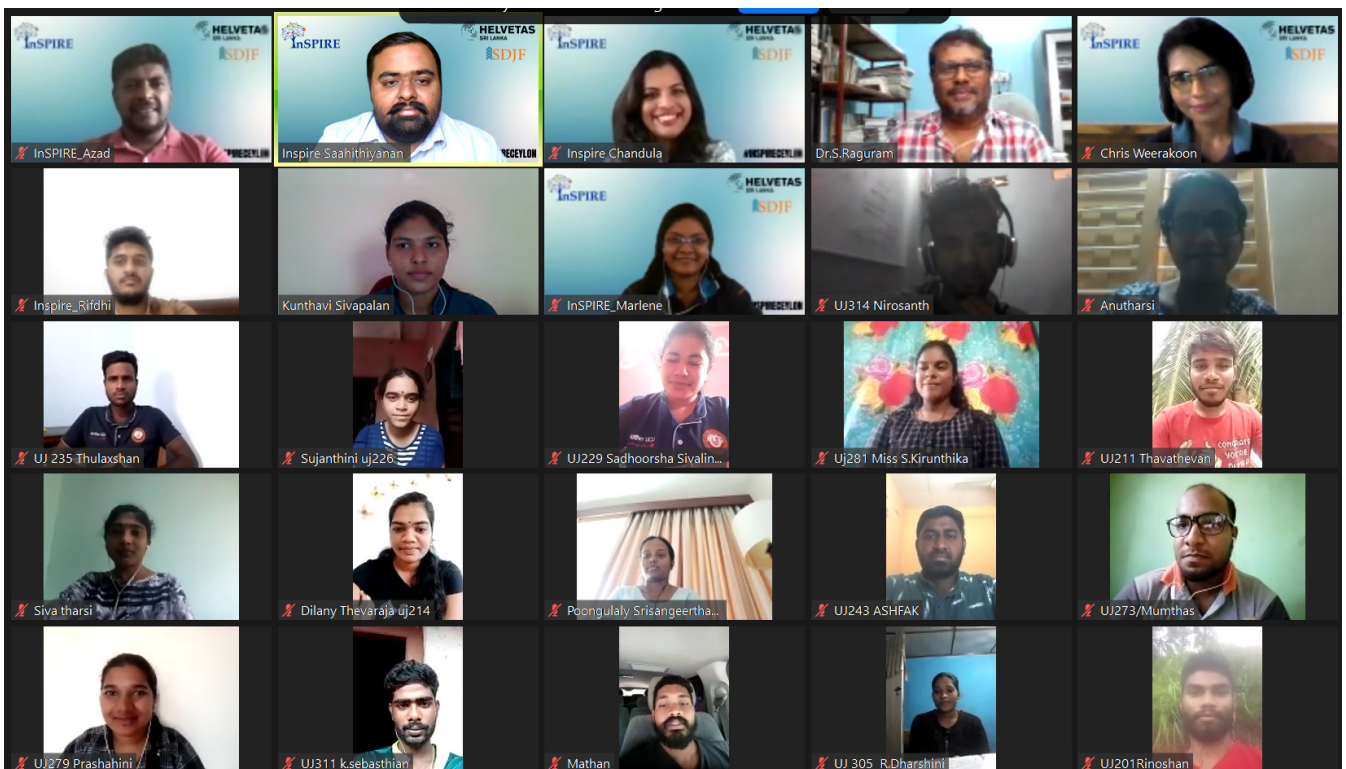
Participants for the group competition



Participants for the individual competition

Participants for the orientation

**"InSPIRE provided us the exciting opportunity to get together virtually with our friends as a team and take part in the competitions. We had a great time finding answers for the "Treasure Hunt". The individual competition was well designed to enhance our creative skills as well as the knowledge. on important thematic areas such as Freedom of Expression, Right to Information, Civic Activism and Covid-19 Pandemic." - Ms. Sadhoorsha Sivalingam, Student**



At the final day programme; the Zoom orientation and award ceremony were held with the participation of distinguished invitees from the university and members from both SDJF and HELVETAS as well as the students who were eagerly anticipating to witness the winners. Apart from providing clear insights on the project, introducing the staff to the students and announcing the winners, the event had many interesting activities including games. The initiative planted the seed of optimism for greater prospects in the upcoming project implementations.

**“It is really impressive to have such a programme organized, especially during a situation like Covid-19, to keep the students engaged, as it has been a stress reliever to many of them.”**

**- Dr. S. Raguram,  
Head of the Department of Media Studies.**

## **EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY TO ADAPT TO THE NEW NORMAL - THE MEDIACORPS WATCH ONLINE NEWS MAGAZINE**

In phase IV of the MediaCorps watch programme, journalists mainly focused on sharing information that has the ability to encourage communities to find new ways to adapt to the new normal, affect policy level decisions, call for government intervention on certain issues and create awareness among rural communities on critical information of governmental decisions that could eventually affect day to day activity.

This in turn attracted the attention of viewers from a cross section of sectors. Business investors, policy makers, emeritus and like-minded individuals aided the lives of the individuals featured in the weekly News Magazine. During this period, 8 news magazines were produced. To find out more on this visit the [MediaCorps Watch facebook](#) page.



## As such, the Programme has impacted: -

1

**The maze farmers affected by the Fall Armyworms:** The report which was filed from Kinnya, Trincomalee district influenced the agricultural department to provide technical support subsequent to the publishing of the report which highlighted the need for training to understand the pest attack better.

2

**A family of three in the Hambantota District:** Steps were taken by the State ministry of rural housing and construction and building materials industries promotion to provide a house and a tentative house for the family of three after their story of homelessness was featured on the News magazine.

3

**Vehicle owners:** Vehicle owners who had obtained their vehicles on lease were facing a dilemma due to their inability to pay off their lease on time due to a loss of income during the quarantine period. A large community of owners whose livelihood depends on daily wages were severely affected during this time. MediaCorps Watch therein filed a report on how the grace period was in fact, extended by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka - a vital piece of information which was not known especially among three-wheeler drivers- enabling these vehicle owners to oppose unreasonable demands by the employees of finance companies to pay off the lease with high interest before the said period.

4

**A child with hearing impairment:** A report was filed from Monaragala about a struggling family of three - Father, mother and son - all faced with the challenge of a loss of hearing. In addition, the report also highlighted their financial struggles to provide their son with a hearing aid. After the story was published on the MediaCorps watch magazine, a donor group called "Wellassa voice" agreed to take full responsibility in collecting sufficient funds to repair the hearing aid. Steps were then taken by the donor group to collect a total sum of 375,000 out of which 27,500 rupees had already been raised in order to help the child.

5

**An aspiring female sign language journalist:** The magazine produced Sri Lanka's first sign language news report encouraging inclusivity and bringing in a novel media culture which was not seen in mainstream media before.

6

**Small scale businesses:** The story of Siriyalatha from Thabbowa was an inspiring one. Her story as a struggling coconut frond weaver was featured by MC fellow Lasantha Wickremeratne, in October. She lamented how the pandemic has negatively impacted her business. But in just a few weeks since the publishing of the story Siriyalatha's business reached new heights. She is not only a proud business owner but an employer of 10 employees. Not only has she built her business to export her goods to Italy, but she has also been able to help her community during these troubled times.



**MediaCorps**  
**WATCH**



# MEDIACORPS FELLOWS OF THE MONTH



**Prasad Purnamal**



**Laksantha Wickramarathna**



**Tharushika Swarnodi**

Journalism and telling stories do not always begin at the desk of a journalist. With mobile Journalism emerging as a trending tool for storytelling, three MediaCorps Fellows decided to share their knowledge and expertise with the community to make them a part of a greater voice. The Fellows Prasad Purnamal, Lasantha Wickramarathna and Tharushika Swarnodi who have been making the best use of the skill they learnt by continuing to produce high-quality and appealing MoJo stories have initiated a MoJo movement called MoJo News LK dedicated to capture stories from rural corners of the country.

In early December, they started their YouTube Channel **MoJo News LK** which has a regular and constant upload of interesting content from news to entertainment. On December 13, they also conducted a MoJo training program for 30 youth in Negombo region and have also conducted several pocket trainings for rural communities in their area as a platform to amplify their voice.

The three friends are quite ambitious of the journey they started that the next big step they aim at is to establish a formal organization under the same name to collaborate with provincial journalists from each of the twenty-five districts of Sri Lanka. We are elated to see how the small steps we took are going a long way to benefit not just the direct beneficiaries of the work we do, but even beyond, to be of service to a larger community!

**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:



**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

