

INTROSPECTION

Quarterly Newsletter of Internews Sri Lanka



Protecting the franchise of a marginalized community

Internews Story Fellow Prasad Purnamal reported on a marginalized fishing community not having access to a polling station, resulting in repeated low voter turnout. This story was shared on several [print](#), [web](#) and [television](#) platforms, revealing that many offshore villages in Kalpitiya do not get a polling station. To reach the closest polling station, villagers travel a long distance through marshy lands in a tractor or across rough seas by boat, spending their own money and risking their lives.

The Election Commission (EC) of Sri Lanka [publicly acknowledged](#) that they did not know of this issue prior to Prasad's reporting. As a temporary solution, the Commission provided transportation on election day to reach the existing polling station and promised to establish a polling station closer to the villages in the future.

This Fellowship Program was part of a project focusing on driving more balanced, accurate, and responsible reporting by journalists on electoral issues, and promoting citizen engagement in democratic processes. Prasad's story inspired election monitors of Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) to visit Kalpitiya to assess the situation. TISL noted the potential for election regulation violations such as voter transportation in the current situation and is planning to report their observations to the EC and other stakeholders. Prasad pledges to follow through this story until the villagers get an accessible polling station.

2020 at a Glance

Trained:

- 220+ youth on media literacy
- 134 journalists and activists on fact checking
- 71 journalists on election reporting
- 39 journalists and activists on combating hate speech
- 3 cohorts of trainers on fact checking, election reporting and peaceful pluralism

Developed five new resources:

- Toolkit for Fact-Checkers and Digital Verifiers
- Toolkit on Identifying and Responding to Hate Speech
- Curriculum on Election Reporting
- Curriculum on Peaceful Pluralism
- Handbook titled "An Introduction to Religious Pluralism in Sri Lanka"

Published:

- 45+ content pieces through the Fellowship Program

Way forward with the Pandemic

Training Remotely



Internews Sri Lanka has been continually adapting project activities so they can be held online or with smaller groups. The challenge facing the team was creating a virtual training space where participants could fully immerse themselves and engage with one another. Internews sought to find solutions through discussions with potential participants as well as other country offices with successes.

As a result, the trainings were made shorter—3-hour sessions instead of full day. An allowance to cover data charges was provided to the participants. During the pre-test, it was clear that several participants had not used online training tools before. Thus, Internews commissioned an IT expert to provide a training on how to use programs such as Teams, Kahoot, Miro and MentiMeter.

Leading up to the training, the team curated and delivered an “online training care package” to each participant. This included a headset, snacks, beverages and some stationary, and it let the participants know that Internews cared for them even from afar.

Participants were asked to keep their cameras on as much as possible, and the trainer spoke directly into the camera to stimulate a more personal connection. Fun group activities, breakout sessions, and videos were included amply to avoid online training fatigue.

Keeping Information Flowing

Internews adopted an organizational COVID-19 strategy to help better respond to the pandemic. Communicating life-saving health information is a critical piece of the strategy.

Through the Story Fellowship Program, Internews supported the production of three types of COVID-19 related information: content on having an election amidst a pandemic, content that counters false information and hate speech, and content with critical information. Written content focused on effect of the pandemic on election procedures and violations of COVID-19 preventive regulations, false information on the risk of contracting the virus through fish consumption, the effect of the pandemic on apparel sector workers, and the state of government-run quarantine centers. Videos which debunk COVID-19 false information, combat hate speech and raise awareness were published. Fellows also explored new forms of content such as flyers and cartoons.

As a cluster of COVID-19 patients was identified at an apparel factory, a wave of hate speech targeted at apparel sector workers emerged, often with sexist connotations. Youth participants of the media literacy conference organized by our partner Sri Lanka Unites were seen actively combating these by creating social media content with counter messages.



Internews is an international non-profit media development organization with a presence in 100+ countries, whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard. Internews has been working in Sri Lanka for 15+ years.

