

INTROSPECTION

Quarterly Newsletter of Internews Sri Lanka

Women pluralism trainers break new ground



Priyadarshini Sivarajah (first row center) conducting an online training for women journalists and activists along with guest speaker Senel Wanniarachchi (first row left)

Priyadarshini Sivarajah – better known as ‘Priya’ by her colleagues and ‘amma’ (mom) by her three young children – now wears yet another hat: that of a pluralism trainer. As one of six new women trainers upskilled through Internews’ Training of Trainers, held in December 2020, Priya and her peers now design and deliver their own trainings on pluralism, and have the soft skills to improve their own capacities as mentors. Like many women, during the pandemic, Priya has been working from home while also overseeing her children’s education. Internews organized all meetings and trainings in timeslots that were least disruptive to the participating women.

“I have experienced ethnic violence firsthand since I was a child. As a minority woman in journalism, I have faced tremendous challenges. My goal is to equip younger female journalists with tools and skills that I wish I had when I was their age. Internews has provided me a platform for just that.”

Priyadarshini Sivarajah

During the month of January, Priya and her five peer trainers conducted a virtual three-day peaceful pluralism training for 11 young female activists and journalists, selected from a pool of 80 applicants. Following the training, 67% of participants had improved their knowledge around pluralism, reporting on religious freedom, human rights, and ethnic/religious diversity. Many were inspired to consider new approaches to reporting and pluralism, and they collectively brainstormed more than 50 potential story concepts around women, the peace process and pluralism, with over 20 content pieces currently in production by participants, with support from their mentors. In an overwhelmingly positive [feedback video](#) from participants, one participant reflected that she was now “brimming with ideas.”

Priya is now working to make trainings more accessible to minority Tamil and Muslim journalists, especially Tamils living in estates who have little access to opportunities because of structural discrimination. In March, she worked with Internews to host a Tamil-language News Lab, attended by 15 young minority journalists. Participants went on to produce 30 stories on peaceful pluralism, several of which are posted on the Internews Sri Lanka [Facebook page](#).

Quarter in Figures

- 165 youth from 7 provinces trained in media literacy and peacebuilding
- 494 school students trained in media literacy through workshops at school premises
- 11 women journalists and activists trained in peaceful pluralism
- 15 journalists trained through the Tamil language News Lab
- 1 Safe Sisters guide on digital safety for women and girls localized and published in 3 languages (Sinhala, Tamil, English)
- 40 pieces of content on democracy produced and published
- 15 pieces of content on pluralism produced – 6 published, 9 pending

Reaching rural areas with media literacy and democracy-related information

Internews' fellowship program has successfully increased the volume of radio content being produced with a focus on themes such as COVID-19, hate speech, misinformation, social media literacy, journalistic ethics, Sri Lanka's response to the UNHRC Sri Lanka sessions, and the need to hold provincial council elections. Radio remains the second most popular source of information in Sri Lanka and is especially important in rural areas. Internews worked closely with Ajith Wasantha Epa and T K Mahinda, radio journalists representing Uva and Ruhunu radio stations respectively, on the production of nine topical programs. The two community radio channels cover 12 districts, with Uva radio reaching approximately 400,000 households and Ruhunu reaching approximately 600,000 households. These programs have helped to enhance media literacy among the rural community, particularly youth. Their success is owed to the strategic selection of guest speakers, and the extensive mentoring and review process.



Ajith Wasantha Epa conducting a radio program

"Dawase Awadanaya program on Uva Community Radio was appreciated by a large number of listeners for providing information on media ethics, myths and hate speech. I received positive feedback from media students, teachers, and members of civil society. Segments on UNHRC mechanism and provincial council elections were particularly praised. Listeners told us that these programs helped them understand the context and helped them form independent views."

Ajith Wasantha Epa
Veteran Radio Journalist at Uva Community Radio

Building a future generation of peacebuilders

Thanks to seven in-person workshops conducted by Internews Partner Sri Lanka Unites (SLU), 494 Sri Lankan school students (over 50% female) across nine districts now have an enhanced knowledge of media literacy, peacebuilding, and the importance of reconciliation. The students trained under this activity will go on to conduct their own workshops as 'peer trainers', continuing their engagement with SLU's reconciliation centers well beyond the project's lifespan. The workshops built upon previous SLU activities by involving the participants of the Core Leaders' Conference and youth media literacy workshop held last year as trainers and volunteers.

"There have been instances here where hate speech was spread to incite violence between communities. I learned through this training that we should not do such things on social media, and instead share messages that promote peace and harmony between communities."

Student in Nuwaraeliya, Central Sri Lanka



Students engaging in content creation activities

Focus topics included intercultural understanding, communal tensions, social media landscape, hate speech, and creating counter narratives. Many students mentioned that this was the first time they had been exposed to any of these concepts, and that they appreciated having the opportunity to access such trainings despite living remotely. Each individual workshop saw students collaboratively produce five posters, which are now displayed at respective SLU reconciliation centers. The best posters will be shared on SLU Facebook page and be displayed at reconciliation centers.



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.