

INTROSPECTION

Quarterly Newsletter of Internews Sri Lanka

Safe Sisters Phase II commences with an Up-skilling Training for Trainers (ToT)



Figure 1: Mahisha Balraj and Piyumi Wattuhewa presenting their groups' findings to the gathering



Figure 2: Master trainer Yukthi Gunasekara conducting up-skilling training on trainer skills

Quarter in Figures

- 7 Safe Sisters from phase I received second round of grants to conduct digital security trainings
- A networking event was held between CSO and Media sectors in the Southern province
- 26 participants (13 journalists/ 13 CSO representatives) participated for the event
- Southern Mojo Lab was launched with 11 (8 F, 3M) participants
- 2 Safe Sister trainings were conducted in Matale and Badulla for 20 female participants

Addressing a timely need of the grassroots communities in Sri Lanka to improve their digital security literacy, Internews commenced Safe Sisters Phase II in January with an up-skilling session for 7 Safe Sisters from phase I. Phase II commenced following the official 'Certificate Awarding Ceremony' organized for the 11 Safe Sisters who successfully completed their projects which spanned between 3-5 months. This close-out ceremony bore witness to the achievements of our Safe Sister fellows; prior to awarding the certificates, the fellows were provided an opportunity to present the digital security projects they completed as part of the fellowship. This sharing session played a key role in capturing challenges, opportunities, and lessons learnt from the fellowship, and created an open space where the fellows actively engaged in conversation learning from and giving feedback to each other's projects.

Some of the key highlights for sustainability included Mahishaa Balraj sharing about how they have injected content from the Safe Sister Digital security manual into her organization's (Hashtag Generation) training curriculum on preventing hate speech and violence on social media, Shelani Palihawadana sharing about using the Safe Sister Manual as part of their (Youth Advocacy Network's) Gender, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights trainings at grassroots level, Sarah Pathirana and Kalavarshyny Kanagaratnam discussing about the potential to rollout digital security training during project phase II, to the Women Activists who were part of their phase 1 follow-up project from Uva Shakthi Foundation. As well, the video interview of 'National Child Protection Authority (NCPA)' created by Paba Piyaratne and Shelani Palihawadana as part of their follow-up project possesses high value as an advocacy and content material for future project activities. On the other hand, the key challenge highlighted was the limited project period which didn't quite go hand in hand with the mobilization restrictions posed by the pandemic.

Following the successful wrap up of phase I, project phase II kick started with two up-skilling sessions designed for the participants. Digital Security Specialist, Vibhooshi Balakrishnan and the Corporate Coach Yukthi Gunasekara were involved as resource personnel to conduct two sessions on digital security and training of trainers respectively.



Figure 3: Safe Sisters posing with the project team for a group photo

Networking event laid the groundwork for addressing a key issue in plantation sector in South!



The panel headed by government officials responding to civil society and media enquiries



Group discussions on opportunities to collaborate happening on the first day of the event

Internews Sri Lanka conducted a 2-day stakeholder networking event between CSOs, journalists, and public officials from the Southern province during March. Addressing the need to enhance networking between influential stakeholders working on religious freedom, human rights and ethnic/ religious diversity, the event marked the first of series of networking events which are planned to be conducted around the island in the coming months. 26 individuals representing 20 organizations and media outlets from the Southern province participated for the event. The key highlights of the event included the panell discussion headed by three government officials from Galle district. Former District Mayor Methsiri de Silva, Assistant District Secretary Mohomad Sharfas and the District Community Police Coordination Officer Nirosha Hettigoda were the three panelists and these discussions resulted in exploring pressing issues prevalent in the province, gaps in collaborations between the different stakeholders and identifying areas of potential collaborations between journalists, activists, and government officials.

Desi Nanayakkara, the president of the Estate Sector workers' union mentioned,

“Plantation sector workers in Southern province are discriminated from accessing their birth certificates and national identity cards from a long time. We daily hear how the lack of access to documentation to prove their identity result in numerous issues. They can’t obtain government jobs and their kids cannot be sent to local schools and there are many other issues. Because of this plantation people are living with raging anger towards majority communities and we should take immediate actions to subside the growing misunderstandings”.

The youth wing of Manawa Shakthi Foundation headed by Mohamed Nasreen will be connecting with Estate Sector Plantation Union together with the help of the journalists in the area to address this issue. Moreover, a youth activist; Umeshi Gunarathne from the Center for Youth and Social Development (CEYSD) along with the members of her organization will be providing the required assistance for issues addressed by the Community Police in the district as it was revealed through the discussion that Community Police officers are looking for the support of youth groups in the area. Manawa Shakthi Foundation will be closely monitoring the progress of these promised collaborations in the upcoming months.

Ten young women activists in Matale trained on digital security by Safe Sister Fellow



Participants having a group discussion

Nuha Nizar, a Safe Sister fellowship recipient, in its phase II, conducted a digital security training for 10 female youth activists (aged 20 -30 yrs). The trained group included 1 Hindu and 9 Muslim girls attached to several youth organizations based in the Matale district. The training specifically focused on countering hate speech and online gender-based violence.

Iham Kaliha, a participant from Sri Lanka Unites Matale branch mentioned how this training was particularly useful for her to counter the online hatred and violence she encounters in social media as an activist. She has not previously participated in any cyber security training, and she mentioned she will take immediate actions to monitor her online activities including changing the passwords she used for her accounts, backing up the data and using safe web browsers. Sarah Saleem who works at ACTED Sri Lanka recollected her own experience during the training and mentioned that,

“This training was particularly useful for me as somebody hacked my phone a few months back and I was super confused at that moment. It all happened because I installed an app for GPS location and suddenly my Whatsapp got deleted and phone got stuck. Today I learned that this might have happened because I was so careless in using social media as well as I never read the agreements when downloading apps. Thank you, Nuha, and Internews for organizing this and I will surely share the knowledge I got from this training with my colleagues and friends”.

A periodic follow up to be carried out next quarter to gather insights on how participants are incorporating learnings into their day-to-day activities by the participants



Mojo newslab launched to raise awareness on pressing issues in the Southern province



Ms. Anoja Makavita conducting her session

The kick-off of a mobile journalism focused news lab took place in March. The news lab was different from the ones conducted so far as it solely focuses on training journalists and activists in the Southern province to produce and publish quality mobile journalism content. Special attention was given to training young women and accordingly a group of 12 journalists and activists comprising of 8 female and 4 male participants were selected. The news lab launch consisted of salon-type discussions where four key thematic issues in Southern province were discussed by thematic experts in the region.

The sessions covered the topics of "Life of tea estate workers and reconciliation processes in Sri Lanka", "Co-relation between the Covid-19 pandemic and gender-based violence in Southern Province", "Post- conflict social attitudes and challenges in the southern province for peace building, reconciliation, human rights and transitional justice" and "How the pandemic has economically affected women led households and small medium enterprises in South and its impact on peace and reconciliation.

The sessions were designed to create awareness on compelling issues in South through which the participants can get information and ideas for the mojo pieces that they will be creating after the initial training. Attention was given to highlight topics that affect peace pluralism and reconciliation in the area.

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.

