



SDJF

COMMUNICATION ^{4D}

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Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum(SDJF)

Annual Report 2013

Media is not just for dictating what is happening around elites, but also for safeguarding democracy, facilitating reconciliation, inclusive transformation and addressing voice poverty around the disadvantaged.

Sri Lanka
Development
Journalist
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(SDJF)

Annual Report - 2013

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01. Message from Chairperson

The year 2013 has been yet another effective year for Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) especially of being able to implement three more successful interventions – Engaging youth on radio for Social Advocacy, Hosting GCRA 2014 international conference and Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Program. SDJF further enhanced its capacity and proved its commitment to promote inclusion, pluralism and interfaith with the use of strategic media. Reaching more than 25,000 marginalized persons who do not find access and space within the mainstream media, was an achievement of SDJF.

With the progress, engaging youth for peace building and positive social change has now become a specific priority of SDJF. More than 120 youth were trained on using creative media for positive social change. Importantly, enhancing the ethnic diversity of its youth network has opened up new avenues for future interventions. In the year 2013, SDJF also focused on conceptualizing the idea of using media in promoting gender sensitive active non-violence while establishing its training programs on gender and media. With the first-hand experience of hosting GCRA 2014 international conference SDJF realized expanding its scope supporting the enhancement of Media and information Literacy (MIL) and media education. Creating exchange for learning opportunities for the local academicians to understand the modern trends of media education around the globe and to enhance the quality of media education in Sri Lanka. It's mandated that SDJF will work closely with local academic institutions during the next couple of years on this regard.

The comments and feedback received not only from the public but also from various scholars, and media encouraged SDJF to organize more programmes in the next year. I also take this opportunity to express my thankfulness to donors, partner organizations, consultants and staff for the support extended in 2013 while wishing the same in 2014 too.

Prof. WADP Wanigasundera
Chairperson, Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF)

02. Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF)



Sri Lankan Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) is a well-established national level organization, with more than 7 years of extensive experience in promoting the role of media in democratization and positive social change. We work closely with Local and international media organizations, civil society organizations, child, youth and women movements, and other organizations com-

mitted to promote similar goals. SDJF has specialised knowledge and expertise in areas such as Media for Transformation, Community Media for Inclusive Development, and Training and Capacity Building while it considers Democracy, Equality, Social Justice, Diversity and Environment as their cross-cutting themes.

Vision and mission

Vision

A country where media plays an accountable role promoting positive social change and democratic values

Mission

Be the leader in transformation with the use of media tools, strengthen community media, advocate democratic values and undertake training and capacity building.

Organizational Objectives

1. To advocate democratic values, including social justice and equality, through the use of media
2. To facilitate positive transformation and inclusive development by strengthening community media in Sri Lanka.
3. To build the capacity of youth and women to become positive change makers
4. To encourage the use of new technology to create a comprehensive macro environment for new media and accountability.

Thematic focus

Considering the Sri Lankan context and previous project findings, SDJF has decided to continue its work under below mentioned thematic areas for another four years.

Media for positive social change

Under this program, SDJF focus on activities which promote Gender Equality and Justice, child rights, Ethnic and Religious pluralism, Gender-sensitive active Non-violence (GSANV), democratic values, and creative problem solving approaches.

Youth, children, women and unheard civil society are the direct beneficiaries of this programme area. SDJF is of the view that youth are active agents in positive social change, and therefore formed a youth network. Enhancing the skills of youth around creative tools such as arts, culture, sports, drama and media to facilitate positive social change is another priority under this program area.

Furthermore, mobilising the voices around violations of women and child rights, advocating related global conventions are given equal attention too.

In the meantime, SDJF produces media content for several different media institutions in this program area.



Community Media for Inclusive Development

Addressing the voice poverty across the regions, inviting civil society to participate in the process of democracy and enhancing the community media sector are some of the activities carried out by the Forum under the program area called community media for inclusion. Promoting freedom of expression, communicational rights of the civil society, community media policy development, and media and information literacy are given an equal priority as well.



Training and Capacity Building

This is one of the core programme areas of SDJF which is interlinked with the above two program areas. Under this programme, SDJF focus on activities such as radio for social advocacy, Storytelling and social change, New media and participation, Youth and pluralism, Media and conflict transformation, media advocating child rights, Community broadcasting, Sport diplomacy and Arts and culture for transformation. SDJF has been training more than 300 youth on radio for social advocacy and more than 140 Youth on pluralism.

GOVERNANCE

SDJF is governed by an independent pool of experts – Board of Directors that is comprised with two senior academicians with extensive experience in media and transformation, a public service officer – expert in gender and administration and its founder member who is the director/CEO. The chairperson and co-chairpersons are the supreme authorities of the organizations. The policies and policy related decisions taken by board of directors are implemented by the executive director who is the founder member and fully answerable to the board. Board has established a unique gender policy to ensure that SDJF follows the gender venues. The female board members have

unquestionable authority to look at any on-going and upcoming intervention to ensure that gender equality is not being compromised. At the same time, the board of directors is given equal authority to engage SDJF staff in the aspect of organizational management. However, policy related issues are dealt only with the supervision of chairperson and or co-chairperson. As far as finance and procurement is concerned, SDJF do have well established finance and procurement policy and organizational codes and it applies for all the staff including the founder member.



03. Engaging youth on radio for social advocacy: a creative endeavour of mobilizing youth, women and civil society

“Engaging youth on radio for social advocacy” was a project implemented by Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum to empower youth in hard-to-reach areas, namely, Jaffna, through which radio dramas were utilized as a powerful tool of social advocacy to address and advocate issues affecting their community. 20 youths from Jaffna, 12 females and 08 males, concerning the gender aspect, were selected for this project by encouraging them to voice out the main issues that affect them as well as their communities. The key issues which were identified through the project were divided into four themes namely, women, youth, fishery and coexistence. The project objectives were realized by providing proper training for the selected youth to produce ten (10) radio dramas based on four main themes, contacting media organizations to disseminate the changes through media, creating two (02) video documentaries highlighting the key changes and achievements, and developing a social media portal as an interactive space for youth extend advocate future issues that would affect them.

In addition, the youth were provided with an opportunity to participate in 6 media consultations on different aspects of engaging youth on media for social advocacy and a youth press conference for youth to voice the issues. Most importantly, SDJF organized a series of community dialogues around the selected issues based on radio dramas and also launched an out-reach campaign to promote the project among different communities.

Prior to the production of radio dramas, the young participants made a pre-community visit to get exposed to the real issues that exist at the community issues. Hence, the radio dramas were produced based on the real experiences they confronted during their pre-community visit. Significantly, the youth also received the opportunity for a media tour to Colombo. The young participants were not only able to visit Colombo based various media organizations, but they were also able to meet senior media experts and to attend a media conference to reveal their own community issues.





The series of six (06) consultations also helped the youth to gain more insight to media and social advocacy and to hunt for various opportunities available for them. Finally, they were also able to network with media and advocacy professionals.

Once the radio dramas were produced by youth after the completion of the above mentioned activities, the recording and the airing of radio dramas took place with the participation of two (02) senior radio drama artists. The ten (10) radio dramas were recorded and aired through Thendralfm and Jaffna service which belong to SLBC. **Then during the assessment of the aired radio dramas, 80% of the listeners of these radio dramas responded that the dramas have discussed the real issues affecting the people in Jaffna. 75% of the total respondents also reported that they listened to all ten radio dramas.** Furthermore, community dialogues were also carried out under four major themes, namely, women, youth, fishery, and coexistence, with the participation of forty (40) community members for each session, to provide them with space to listen to the 10 radio dramas, reflect about their own life styles, come up with similar stories and

to discuss about the solutions that could be taken at each situation. During the assessment, 85% of the participants of the community dialogues agreed that radio drama is an ideal tool to address common social issues.

In order to assess the effects of the project, SDJF also distributed a questionnaire among randomly selected listeners of the radio dramas to get an insight about their real ideas about the project. After the assessment, 80% of the respondents agreed that radio dramas have succeeded in meeting their objectives, in reflecting the social settings and addressing the issues revolving around people in Jaffna. 80% of the participants also agreed that characters are developed in a way that it brings out the real nature of Jaffna. Even with relation to the listenership, it was found out that more than 70% of the respondents listened to all ten (10) radio dramas aired through the project. The success of the project was also highlighted by many newspaper articles and television interviews conducted regarding the respective project.

Achievements

- First of all, the project succeeded in breaking the three decade silence of youth in Jaffna caused by war. In fact, these youth were earlier denied from many rights, especially in terms of voicing out their issues, to get exposed to the city centered media culture, to find solutions to their own problems through creative and innovative thinking. But, the project allowed them to get exposed to media organizations based in Colombo, to network with media experts, to bring out their talents and creativity through the form of radio dramas for the first time in their lives and also to voice out their issues in an effective manner.
- The project also provided an opportunity for the communities to discuss, argue and criticize the present social conditions and to find proper solutions for such issues based on their own experiences and ideas. In addition, after organizing the community dialogues, civil activists and people formed four (04) network groups to address the issues of the community.
- The participants of the co-existence dialogue forum even agreed to form an interreligious forum without political influence.
- The social media portal established through the project also became a sustainable strategy through which the youth could network with other civil society organizations while sharing radio dramas and discuss about the issues built around them.
- Thus, the project became a success since it did not only break the three decade silence of Jaffna youth and build their capacities, but also because it came up with sustainable strategies to reduce the occurrence of issues that have had a negative impact over the Jaffna community for a long time period.



04. GCRA 2014 International Conference on Media in Transformation: Key focus given to new media and democracy, media literacy and education



The GCRA 2014 International Conference, organized by SDJF was held in Colombo from 14-16 February, on the theme of 'Media in Transformation: exploring the role of ICT, innovative communication and new media'.

25 foreign media professionals from various countries, including UK, USA, Malaysia, Oman, South Africa, Australia, Iran and India were present, along with 40 Sri Lankan academicians from more than 7 different universities island wide.

There were 12 parallel, and 4 plenary sessions through which, for the first time in the past 3 decades, young media students in Sri Lanka were given a wide platform to speak in front of international media scholars, and present their findings to audiences from different continents.

The main themes discussed during the conference are below.





Media Literacy in question

The second issue that is of prime concern has been that, media literacy programs would have to involve distinct processes of production techniques. The guiding principle was that exposure to various creative aspects of media production would lead to greater critical understanding of media products.

The advantages and disadvantages of using popular culture texts in the classroom environment is debatable. The functional argument assumes that the media performs valuable functions in the society so that there is order and continuity in society; while the critical theoretical school believes that corporate media are agents of the ruling dominant class. Media literacy, in this view, may serve as a means to liberate the oppressed classes from the dominant ones and bring about true consciousness among the consumers.

Question on Production Values

The debate on the question of production values is in the context of corporate power and its influence. This is often related to a decline in cultural values. The range of issues related to a systematic approach to studying media includes the fundamental notion that all media messages are "constructed". It also assumes an active role for

the audience, so that the meaning-making processes consist of an interaction between the reader, the text and the culture. An important corollary of this formulation is that media is regarded primarily responsible for social evils and early media literacy programs were aimed to protect young people from 'negative media influences'. Media exposure according to this school of thought was risk factor and media literacy a protective arrangement. This ignores the popularity of the media products among the young.

New media – challenges and way forward

Society is still coping up to meet the challenges of free speech while living up to the highest democratic ideals. The moral responsibility and potential of new media has to be defined clearly. There is one view that there is nothing essentially new about the new media. It is just a different platform. However, new media literacy is needed to make best use of the new technology. Defining the scope and goal of new media, it is needed to understand what new media is about, leading to a scenario where the public become more critical about the media content.

Media and its principles are the same; it's now just a new platform. Using facts, verifying facts and scientifically dealing with facts within the content of new media has become important to maintain a good standard of journalism. The quality of dialogues and its role in shaping the truth should be clearly dealt. There should be a distinction between constructive and deconstructive dialogues. Despite the fact that it's an open forum, open space and each and every individual has their own rights to entertain free speech, the idea of constructive dialogues should be defined clearly. Lots of half-truths and half information are being transformed in new media. While practicing free speech, new media should also prove its efficiency in differentiating truth and right information. On the positive side, new digital technology gives space to marginalized voices. Again, the problem is that many journalists only highlight these marginalized voices. However, much focus should be given to ensure that the voice is heard well and it penetrates through the societal system. New media challenges various institutions that challenge the freedom of expression and democracy. Minorities around the world get a new medium to put their voice out and ensure it is heard. Any other excluded segments by mainstream media have their own space within new media. However, one of the major challenges of new media is verification. New media allows one to say whatever one likes but it doesn't mean it is not affecting the rights of others and their privacy. And again, regulating new media and deciding whom to trust, is also problematic.

Media education – theory and practice

The goal of media education still remains the same and it's not going to change, but how it reaches the change differs and needs more focus. In reaching the change the goal of media education shouldn't be lost. In South Asia, restructuring media education should be one of the main focuses. As the world continues to turn towards South Asia as an emerging global region, the importance of developing media will be increased. This means that it is needed to continue a systemic investment in the field of media and in training journalists and media workers that will enable media to meet future market demand.

Media education in Sri Lanka – Issues discussed

The education industry has to prepare itself to support the changing environment. Media education has to mobilise basic techniques and strategies to facilitate positive social change. The link between media education institutions and media organizations has to be strongly ensured in terms of producing quality media with the ability to support the transformation. Academia, on the other hand, should also be upgraded to meet the needs of the media industry. Media industry and media education are inseparable. In media education, there is a strong link between education on theory and its practical application. Theory should be helping students to learn about the society that media is trying to reach.



Achievements



As mentioned above, GCRA 2014 provided a greater platform for the scholars to critically evaluate and discuss about the newest trends in media and transformation around the globe. Especially, in terms of Sri Lanka, GCRA 2014 can be considered as the first international conference on this theme, organized after three decades of war, bridging the gaps between international and local academia. It also provided ample opportunities for more than 60 Sri Lankan scholars, undergraduates who do not often receive opportunities to participate in many international conferences organized outside Sri Lanka, to get exposed

to the international scholars with valuable experiences. In a macro perspective, it can also be mentioned that the knowledge shared in the conference would also result in further studies and researches in the field of Sri Lankan media which would contribute to the overall development of media.

GCRA 2014 was co-partnered by Ministry of Mass Media and Information - Sri Lanka, The ICTA Agency of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lanka Foundation and Global Communication Research Association and is also supported by the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau and Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.

05. Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Program: A successful intervention to promote tolerance and religious pluralism.

Sri Lanka Forum Theatre Program

Sri Lanka forum theatre program was aimed at solving societal issues through gender sensitive active non-violent means (GSANV), promoting dialogues, enhancing religious and ethnic tolerance, promoting religious and ethnic acceptance. This program was organized by SDJF.

24 young artists were selected for the program and 20 Forum Theatres were created by them. Out of those, 10 were performed in Ampara, and the other 10 in Batticaloa. Through these forums, SDJF was able to spread ideas of Gender sensitive active non-violence and religious tolerance to more than 15,000 community members living in the Eastern province.

Through this program, the community members from Buddhist, Tamil and Muslim ethnic backgrounds, were able to develop non-violent and peaceful values, which could further enhance tolerance, in collaboration with the forum theatre members. In addition, the community members also engaged in dialogues creating timely strategies that could be utilized in solving issues related to religious tolerance in the Eastern province through peaceful means.

It was highlighted that more attention should be paid on developing a united identity as Sri Lankans, through the diversity of different identities. They further conveyed that the special message of this program is to provide equal respect to all religions under a united identity.



Demography

More than 65% of the population attended to the drama were youth. The majority of them were Tamils, (41%), followed by 35% of Muslims, and 24% of Sinhalese.

Level of interest in the Forum Theatre Program

80% of the participants showed their interest to engage in similar dialogues in the future. 73% of the participants showed their interest on taking part in such forum theatres as performers in the future. The participation of young artists representing three main ethnicities was a special characteristic of Sri Lanka Forum theatre Program and 95% of the participants agreed that due to this diverse feature, they were able to gain an advanced knowledge about the diversity in these three religions.

Impacts of Key Messages

83% of them believed that with "ethnic and religious understanding, everyone can lead a mutually good life."

97% said that tolerance of other religions would lead to religions flourishing with equal dignity and respect for all. This shows that the people in these areas believe in tolerance, and that they have no problem living alongside other religions and ethnicities- and can be seen showing respect towards other religions' growth here. This is one of the two messages that have been most successfully put across.

The message of how connected different religions and ethnicities are to each other is one of the two messages that have been very successfully put across. 97% agreed that the idea of each person's identity being unable to be segregated from other religions and ethnicities, but being a part of it, was given out in the program.



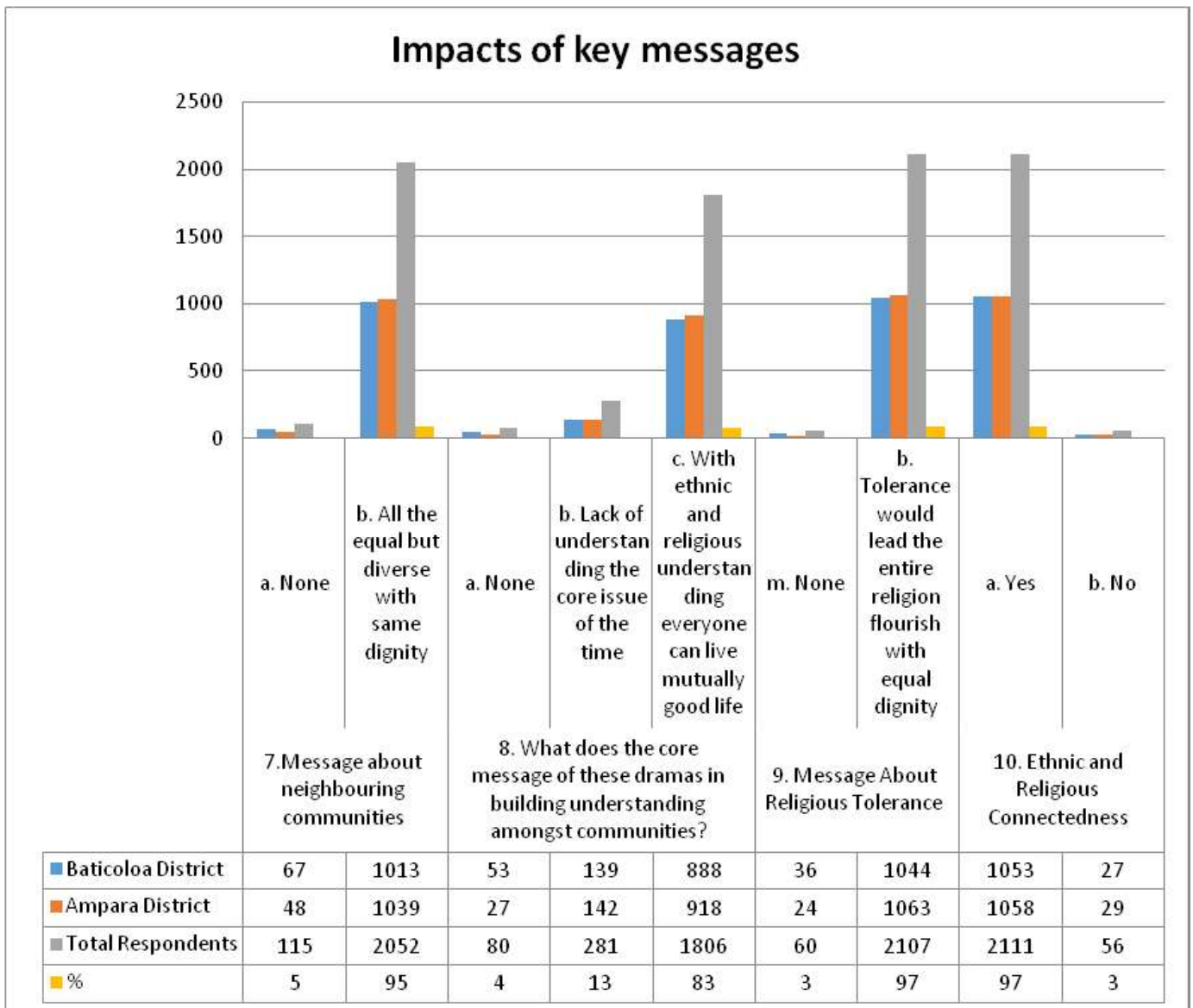


Chart -02 - Impacts of key messages

Judging by all the responses, the Forum theatre program conducted in areas of Ampara and Batticaloa has been quite a success. The people there are interested and enthusiastic about having more programs of the sort in these areas.



Achievements



- Especially, through the forum theatre program, more than 15,000 community members learned the ideas of non-violence and religious tolerance.
- Several hundreds of people given opportunity to develop values that are connected to tolerance while actively participating in the forums challenging the culture of violence.
- It was a for the first time in history that the communities were exposed to a concept like Gender Sensitive Active Non Violence which became practical exposure for them in terms of their real life experiences.
- In the meantime, it provided better opportunities for rural youth to come up with forum theatres through their own innovative ideas. Usually, the rural youth rarely get such opportunities to take part in events like this and to become positive social change makers. But SDJF proved that youth are not passive listeners but they could actually become positive change makers.

In Partnership with:



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Ministry of National Languages and social Integration



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Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs, Land & Land Development and Transport



In the News



SDJF thanks the following organizations for their generous contributions



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Organizational Values

Diversity

We believe that diversity is the universal truth and it feeds strength to human life while offering beauty to the world. Diversity offer extra strength to our organization. Diversity will enrich our programmes which in return will enrich the people's lives.

Dialogue

We believe dialogue is the best way of exploring commonalities and connecting people with different interests together. We promote dialogue, ultimately its purpose is not to win and or lose but to find permanent fix for social conflicts.

Engendering

We believe in equality, justice and gender Sensitive Active-Non Violence (GSANV) and trust that media cannot be a potential tool to foster the positive changes in Sri Lankan society until it adopts gender sensitive approaches.

Learning

Learning will brand us unique while making our interventions meaningful, and deliverables trustworthy. Learning will strength us winning the challenges of the future and it will help us to be rational and sensitively critical of social injustice.