

Report of Media Professional's Training (Sindh-Karachi)

A three-day training workshop for media professionals was conducted in Karachi-Sindh during 11th-13th August 2017. This training was conducted as per module developed for capacity building of media professionals. The main objective of this training was to train media professionals on 'inclusive, responsible, sensitive and objective reporting of minority rights and issues'.



Ranging from twenty-two to twenty-six participants from mainstream media including reporters, photojournalists, city editors, producers, anchors, sub-editors, and writers/contributors of media participated in this training. The participants were from print, electronic, and online media.

Mr. Shahid Shah, Provincial Coordinator (Sindh) of Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR) welcomed the participants. Mr. Shafqat Munir Ahmad, President of JDHR and a trainer of this workshop briefed the participants about the aims and objectives of this training.

To make the session interactive and start to get to know each other, a round of introductions was conducted among participants on the first day of the training.

As per set agenda for this workshop, the first day of the training was divided into two major sessions. In the first session, the trainer described about the importance of inclusive and objective journalism and constitutional provisions. The second session focused on the role of media in promotion of interfaith harmony, interfaith dialogue, and tips for reporting on interfaith and minorities' issues.

Day 1:

First Session:

Topic: Importance of Inclusive and Objective Journalism

Mr. Munir argued that the media represent only a small group of people and the rest of the people are being excluded from the media. Therefore, almost 80 percent of media space is mainly consumed by a few hundred elites. The presence of marginalized section in media discourses is neglected. Mass media is not inclusive of marginalized groups of Pakistani society particularly for religious minorities, women and children. Mr. Munir stressed that we need to find out the ways to utilize media space to cater the needs of common people.

The trainer described that if we analyze media space, we can see that the space is divided into three: 1) Objective Space; 2) Pro-active Space and 3) Reactive Space. Mr. Munir stated that objectivity is a key pillar in Journalism. Objective journalism is ultimately the factual journalism that remains credible and relevant to given society. Objective journalism tells the audience the truth and not caters to the politicized segments of audience as the affirmative journalism does. Unfortunately, across the world and especially in Pakistan, affirmative journalism prevails, though some media outlets still believe in objective journalism. Affirmative journalism caters to vested interests of elite class. Such media caters the needs of those who pay for media space.

On the same topic, Alveena, an anchor of BolTV Channel gave her opinion that each individual in the media can play a significant role in creating inclusive society. Mainstream media commonly represent corporate/elite interests, so media professionals should find their alternative ways from where they can advocate the interests of those excluded from the mainstream media.

Mr. Munir, the trainer, said that the media should be independent and free of any influence from government or corporate sector. It is the responsibility of the media to ensure that media gives voice to all parties. The mass media serves the interests of elite class by giving coverage to those issues favorable to elite agenda and filtering out those that are not the interest of that class. Media should help marginalized people by disseminating their viewpoints and amplify the voices of these communities.

Mr. Munir emphasized that media organizations in Pakistan are catering to the needs of audience as different audience have different communication needs. From Pakistani media, we see ARY catering to a particular group of audience and GEO is catering to another type of audience but somehow Dawn tries to be objective. Similarly, other news media outlets take positions depending upon their client's needs.

The trainer explained that media organizations can use various media tools such as advertising to achieve their own objectives so journalists can write articles, editorials and features to increase breadth and depth of minority voice.

Second Session:

Topic: Constitutional Provisions related to Right to Freedom and Equality

Mr. Khalid Jameel, a trainer, mentioned a number of constitutional provisions related to right to freedom of information and equality. He stated that Article 20 of the constitution offers freedom to everyone to profess, practice and propagate their religion and to manage their religious institutions. All religious community members have the right to establish, maintain, and manage their religious institutions. While quoting Article 19 of the constitution, Mr. Jameel stated that the importance of right to freedom of speech and expression but he also stressed

that this *right* is subject to reasonable restrictions being imposed under *Article 19(2)*. He further described the importance of the role of the media as fourth pillar of the state. However, the media is responsible for what to report and how to report a story.

Every media person must know and remember laws related to protection of minority's rights. For example, the trainer referred Article 36 that protects the rights of every citizen and the state shall safeguard the interests and rights of minorities. The trainer quoted Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's speech of August 11, 1947 in which the Quaid explicitly spoke of giving equal rights and freedom to the religious minorities of Pakistan. Therefore, media is also responsible to represent different religious groups accurately and fairly to support good relations among wide range of religious communities.

Day 2:

Ms Uzma Latif conducted the training sessions on second day of the media training. The session opened the session with the introduction of the participants. The main discussion of the second day was around the topic of **'Understanding identities' and 'Stereotypes'**.

The main aim of the second day of this training session was to build critical understanding on the issues faced by the minorities based on their identities. Another objective of this training was to create an understanding that negative stereotypes associated with minorities lead to violent and intolerant society. Two exercises were conducted to develop the understanding as to how people construct identities with the help of social interactions.

It was learnt that some identities make us vulnerable but some identities are important because they give us power and status in the society. People have multiple identities but different social situations compel people to associate themselves to different identities at different situations. The significant key message of the training session was that we need to focus on commonalities based on our identities rather than differences to build peaceful co-existence among communities.

The second session of the day 2 focused on the role of media reporting in peace building. The trainer described that media serves as an agency for building peace in a society while ensuring their safety. Journalists can provide a channel for communication between parties. The important point is that a journalist can build a counter narrative of peace by highlighting such stories, which can break stereotypes and prejudices. In this way, media can disseminate a positive image through positive stories of tolerance.

Third Day

Topic: Interfaith harmony

Mr. Munir, the trainer, emphasized that the media, as an influential institution of the society, can play a key role in disseminating the values of tolerance, which is essential in countering extremism. The participants agreed that a journalist should be a neutral and legal person to promote peace. The media can play a role of a bridge among various segments of Pakistani society to build understanding and create an environment of trust and mutual respect. The focus of the media should be on unity, not division, and on commonalities among members of society hailing from different cultures and religions. This can be possible by providing an atmosphere of dialogue among various community groups. The journalists should give unbiased consideration to all the media reporting.

While highlighting the importance of increasing the role of media in promoting interfaith harmony, Mr. Jameel stressed that media professionals should give importance to the careful selection of words in reporting of any incidents. The media should prevent all forms of expressions, which spread incite, and promote hatred based on intolerance. We need to respect beliefs of other religions for building a peaceful society.

In the second half of the day, Mr. Munir presented conceptual issues around hate speech and illustrated how hatred can be harmful for any society. He described

various better ways to report these issues in order to promote an environment of respect for diversity in our society. Media professionals should be aware of the consequences of any publication that carries hate speech as it can be harmful for themselves as well as for their institution. The trainer emphasized that media must be socially responsible and work for the benefit of the society.

The participants agreed that they need to work together for countering extremism and promoting peace at individual level. In response to a question raised by a participant, Mr. Munir suggested that the media workers should internalize that no story is worth dying for and safety should be their first priority. Media workers should adopt professional and objective approach so that they should not generate discriminatory material.



A newsroom practice was carried out for the participants on understanding how to cover minority issues in media reporting. Four groups of the participants were created to conduct this newsroom practice. These groups worked on different

types of media reporting, including electronic, print, online media. Each group presented their work in the form of news bulletin, news report and blog. The participants informed the trainer that this exercise was very useful in learning some useful tips to report minority issues.

At the end of the training, certificates were awarded to the participants.

