



POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND

EVALUATION REPORT

UNDEF project UDF-BGD-13-559: Rural Media Development for Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Bangladesh (Bangladesh)

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluator. They do not represent those of UNDEF or any of the institutions referred to in the report

Authors

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Acronyms

| | |
|----------|---|
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| HDI | Human Development Indicators |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology Act |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| OECD-DAC | Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation – Development Assistance Criteria |
| UNDEF | United Nations Democracy Fund |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEG | United Nations Evaluation Group |



Stack of newspapers in Khulna

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I. Executive Summary

This is an evaluation of the ‘Rural Media Development for Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Bangladesh’ project which aimed to strengthen the capacity of journalists and CSOs/NGOs in rural areas to report on human rights issues with the aim of holding duty-bearers to account for their actions. The project was implemented by News Network, over a two year period from 1 December 2015 to 30 November 2016 with a budget of USD 225,000.

The evaluation was carried out in September 2017 by a sole evaluator with the aim of determining whether the project was implemented in accordance with the project document and to see if anticipated project results were achieved. The evaluation used the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and the added criterion of UNDEF-added value. It adopted a qualitative methodology which comprised of documentary review, including random sampling of original project records onsite; interviews with News Network staff, trainers and UNDP in Dhaka; site visits to two project districts (Khulna and Jessore) consisting of interviews and group meetings with local coordinators and beneficiaries (journalists, editors, CSO/NGO representatives); observation visit to the offices of newspaper, ShomayerKhabar, in Khulna; and an email questionnaire to all beneficiaries in the other 10 districts that were not visited. In total, the evaluation received inputs from 77 individuals comprising 61 males and 16 females.

Overall this was a very sound investment for UNDEF in a well-structured project which has yielded concrete dividends and laid the foundation for a nationwide network of journalists concerned with human rights issues, particularly in rural marginalised areas.

- The project is highly **relevant**; it is much needed given the context of human rights abuses and the suppression of the media. Moreover, it is also appropriate, despite external constraints, there is sufficient democratic space in Bangladesh for the project to be viable. As evidenced by the project itself, journalists are able to write about a range of human rights issues and call duty-bearers to account.
- The project has been **effective** in meeting its objectives: the skills of journalists in relation to human rights issues have been enhanced, reporting on human rights has increased, and civil society capacity to understand how the media works has improved – though closer engagement between NGOs and the media could be further strengthened.
- The project was carried out in time and funds were used in an efficient manner according to the planned budget. Project implementation data was diligently collected but not sufficiently analyzed to demonstrate the actual progress made by the project. In addition, the lack of coherence in monitoring activities and precision in outcome indicators meant that the project was unable to back up its evident achievements with hard quantitative data.
- For a short-term low budget initiative, the project has done well to contribute to tangible **impacts**. Aside from the direct impacts on the lives of trainees, project participants cited many examples of the way articles on human rights issues stimulated by the project, reportedly led to action by the authorities to address human rights violations. While this evaluation is unable to verify the causal links

between the training and ultimate action by the authorities, especially given the likely complexity of factors, players and motives involved in such situations, it seems evident that journalistic outputs encouraged by the project contributed in some part to changes on the ground.

- The project has had **sustainable** effects at a personal level on the individuals involved. Beyond that, sustainability is less systematic. There is little evidence that participants did much to share learning from the project with other colleagues, for instance, through talks or offshoot training sessions. Ongoing networking between project participants is limited to certain districts where online forums are being used to exchange information. Elsewhere, participants have not seized the initiative to continue collaboration. While the project encouraged the establishment of networks, these could perhaps have been further embedded during the project life.

The evaluation makes the following summary recommendations directed at News Network. There are further suggestions and ideas for taking the work forward in the body of the report, and detailed explanations in the 'Recommendations section'.

1. Replicate the training programme
2. Further disseminate the training content
3. Establish an alumni network
4. Strengthen the M&E system

Sample press clipping

River erosion keeps children away from school

Hundreds of people have been displaced due to ongoing river erosion around the Borakotha union area of Uzirpur sub-districts in Barisal division. In the last five years, several schools, a college, a Madrasa (religious school), market, houses and crop lands have been washed away by the river Shanda. In addition, rural road connectivity has badly affected. The livelihood of affected local communities has become very uncertain. They need shelter and food to survive. However, the local government is not responding to these problems well. Children are the worst-affected victims of all, particularly girls. Pupil dropout in primary and secondary schools has drastically increased in those areas. The teachers of a government primary school said that out of 450 students on the school roll, attendance has now reduced to 115. In order to get children back to school, it is necessary to rebuild or relocate the schools and re-establish the connectivity of the area.

The report was published on 14 January 2016 in a national daily 'ProthomAlo'. Reporter Zahirul Islam was trained by this UNDEF funded project implemented by News Network. He prepared the report based on the findings of a field visit carried out during the training. [Report translated from Bangla to English for this evaluation report.]

I. Introduction

The 'Rural Media Development for Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in Bangladesh' project aimed to strengthen the capacity of journalists and CSOs/NGOs in rural areas to report on human rights issues with the purpose of holding the authorities to democratic account for their actions.

According to UNDP, the **development status** of Bangladesh has improved over the last ten years. The 2015 UNDP Human Development Index ranks Bangladesh 139 out of among 188 countries with an HDI score of 0.579, placing it in the medium development category. Despite this progress, Bangladesh continues to face considerable challenges in sustaining and building on the achievements of the last decade, and in remaining on track to meet its targets under the Sustainable Development Goals. Effective **governance** is critical to ensuring that Bangladesh can make the most of its human potential. Bangladesh is a secular, democratic, multiparty, parliamentary republic. It has made significant progress in promoting competent, effective institutions that respect fundamental human rights and the rule of law, but challenges remain.

According to the 2016 United States' State department report¹, key **human rights** challenges include threats arising from the increased activities and high profile attacks by extremist organisations claiming affiliation with Da'esh and al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent. The government has responded with a strong anti-militancy drive, which human rights groups claim has resulted in increased extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions for the purpose of extortion, enforced disappearances, torture, and other human rights abuses. The government further used counter-terrorism efforts to justify restrictions of civil and political rights. Other significant human rights issues include: early and forced marriage; gender-based violence, especially against women and children; poor working conditions and labour rights abuses; weak judicial capacity and independence; official corruption, infringement on citizens' privacy rights and restrictions on the activities of some NGOs.

Press freedom is a critical concern. Bangladesh ranks 146 out of 180 countries in the 2017 Reporters without Borders, World Press Freedom Index. Human rights group, Article 19, says that Bangladesh faced another violent and repressive year for freedom of expression and press freedom in 2016. Attacks on journalists and the use of criminal defamation provisions were said to stifle free speech with 320 violations against journalists, including three murders, taking place over the course of the year. Article 19 criticises the use of restrictive laws including the Penal Code, Information and Communication Technology Act (amended) and Special Powers Act to harass and silence journalists.

¹US State Department, 2016, Bangladesh 2016 Human Rights Report, available at: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265744.pdf>



Evaluation participants in Jessore

II. Project overview

The **objective** of the project was to strengthen democracy and human rights in social life through media development in rural areas. It was **implemented** by News Network, a local NGO of some 20 years standing specialising in media development initiatives. The project was carried out over a two year period from 1 December 2015 to 30 November 2016 with a **budget** of USD 225,000.

The project's **strategy** was to address human rights violations through increased media reporting and heightened public awareness. It was based on the rationale that human rights violations occur in rural Bangladesh on a regular basis but most go unreported due to a variety of factors, including limited media coverage, low quality of reporting and weak cooperation between local media and CSOs/NGOs. The net effect is that public awareness of human rights violations is low and offences remain unchallenged. The project planned to tackle this by carrying out professional skills training and human rights sensitisation programmes for rural journalists, local editors and CSO/NGO staff. It targeted 540 beneficiaries in 12 of the most marginalised rural districts in Bangladesh. The consequent increased reporting on democracy and human rights issues was in turn expected to raise awareness, stimulate debate and mobilise civil society efforts.

Main **planned actions** were: 12 training sessions for 240 journalists, 12 awareness raising events for 120 editors; 12 training sessions for 180 CSO/NGO staff; 12 network events involving journalists and CSO/NGO staff; follow-up reports by graduates of the training and competition and awards programme.

The **expected outcomes** were:

- 1: Skills of rural journalists based in the 12 target districts enhanced to investigate and report on democracy and human rights related issues.
- 2: Increased focus given to preparing and publishing reports on human rights issues by trained journalists and local media outlets.
- 3: Increased public awareness and mobilized civil society efforts to promote democracy and human rights issues through the media.

III. Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation was set up after the project had closed with the aim of determining whether the project was implemented in accordance with the project document and to see if anticipated project outcomes were achieved. The evaluation is intended to feed into wider lessons learned in order to help UNDEF devise funding priorities and future strategies relating to its overall goal of strengthening human rights and democratic processes and in improving grant management processes. The evaluation takes a forward-looking constructive approach, even when critical, in order to provide an overall narrative of the project story, its challenges, accomplishments and contextual issues. The overarching question answered by the evaluation is “All things, including local context and UNDEF strategic goals, considered, was this project a sound investment of scarce resources?”.

The evaluation used the OECD - DAC evaluation criteria for assessment, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability plus an additional non-DAC criterion, UNDEF value-added. Evaluation questions were developed under this framework and guided the evaluation enquiry. Key UNEG evaluation principles (transparency, impartiality, independence, credibility and utility) formed the ethical framework for evaluation activities.

The evaluation used a qualitative methodology aimed at understanding how the project was implemented, what worked well and what could be improved. All key project stakeholders were consulted: project beneficiaries (journalists, news editors, CSO/NGO staff), project personnel (News Network staff, trainers, local coordinators), and UNDP. External counterparts (local government and other stakeholders) were not available for consultation during the visit.

The following methods were used:

- Documentary review – project management documents and external literature about the context. In addition, a random selection of project records were reviewed onsite e.g. press clippings, training manuals and guidelines; brochures and leaflets, event photos, participant feedback forms and baseline surveys.
- Interviews in Dhaka with News Network staff and project trainers as well as with UNDP.
- Site visits to two project districts (Khulna and Jessore) comprising interviews and group meetings with local coordinators and beneficiaries (journalists, editors, CSO/NGO representatives). This included an observation visit to the offices of newspaper, ShomayerKhabar, in Khulna.
- Email questionnaire to all beneficiaries in the other 10 districts that were not being visited. As anticipated the response rate was very low (9 responses) and not statistically significant; nevertheless the primary purpose was achieved which was to give the remaining 450 project beneficiaries a means of contributing to the evaluation should they wish to do so, and to pick up on examples of interest.

The evaluation used a semi-structured format for questions in interviews, group meetings and the email questionnaire asking respondents what they liked about the project, what could be improved, the difference made, the prospects for sustainability and

recommendations. The evaluation received inputs from 77 individuals comprising 16 females and 61 males - a breakdown of evaluation contributors is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Breakdown of evaluation contributors

| Stakeholder | Male | Female | Total |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| News Network staff, trainers and local coordinators | 6 | | 6 |
| Jessore CSOs/NGOs | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| Jessore Journalists | 9 | 2 | 11 |
| Jessore Editors | 7 | | 7 |
| Khulna CSOs/NGOs | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| Khulna Journalists | 12 | 2 | 14 |
| Khulna Editors | 4 | | 4 |
| UNDP | | 2 | 2 |
| Questionnaire Respondents | 6 | 3 | 9 |
| Total | 61 | 16 | 77 |

IV. Evaluation findings

(i) *Relevance*

The project is very relevant to the context. The repression of the media as written about by international observers was confirmed by evaluation contributors. Some journalists and editors reported receiving threats and harassment from authority figures, the mafia and extremists themselves. Despite media outlets being prolific in Bangladesh, with hundreds of newspaper titles printed weekly and dozens of television and radio stations, as one interviewee put it:

“We have the freedom of publication but not the freedom to write what we think”.

This project itself was thoroughly vetted by the security services before receiving government approval. The media, particularly in rural areas, faces additional challenges to human rights reporting including the lack of capacity and knowledge among journalists on basic reporting skills and human rights issues. Media houses are profit-making businesses and the pressure on cost-efficiency means many rural journalists are often only employed part-time alongside other jobs such as teaching or law which limits their scope for original investigative work. The dependency on advertising for revenue, particularly from local power brokers, also inhibits reporting on corruption and human rights and a tacit self-censorship.

Despite these constraints, the evaluation found sufficient democratic space in Bangladesh for the project to be viable. News network staff and trainers said that given the wide breadth of human rights issues, it was possible to write about systemic human rights issues. Problems tended to arise when specific duty bearers, such as local administrators or police, were criticised. This was borne out in evaluation meetings, trainees confirmed that they had written articles on a very wide range of subjects from the lack of roads and infrastructure through to police brutality resulting in a rich and vibrant cadre of work which helped generate public awareness and mobilise authorities into action (see Impact Section below). The project is therefore not only relevant and needed but also appropriate to its context.



Newspaper production in Khulna

(ii) Effectiveness

The project was effective in meeting its threefold objectives:

- Skills of journalists on technical investigation and reporting skills as well as knowledge of human rights were increased. This was confirmed in evaluation meetings, evaluation questionnaires, and through the sample feedback forms reviewed during the evaluation visit. Journalists and editors typically said they received a good theoretical grounding on human rights in terms of international and national laws but also practical experience, as one journalist put it:

“The field visit helped a lot, through the training we learned that the humanrights story can be given many faces, for instance, by focusing on children, women, the education system etc. This was excellent and very effective”.

The emphasis on enhancing professional skills was also appreciated: as one editor said:

“The training helped us to identify weakness in our reporting, not being detailed enough, not allowing the accused person to have a right of reply, not being reader-friendly enoughsince the training our reporters are more skilled and knowledgeable on different laws, they are able to reportin a way that attracts more readers”.

The teaching on the safety of journalists and reporting within the constraints of the law (restrictions imposed through article 57 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act as much valued.

- The focus on publishing reports on human rights issues was increased according to feedback from journalists and editors who cited many examples of published reports. Clearly the training programme was an inspiration to many, as one journalist said:

“Before the training I was not interested in writing about human rights, after the training I became inspired and plan to write more and more reports about human rights issues”.

The evaluator received copies of many reports from evaluation respondents and was also able to review News Network’s file of press clippings onsite in Dhaka.

A particularly striking feature is the very wide range of human rights issues covered, including, for example, child rights (child trafficking, education), civil and political rights (police brutality, police corruption), women's rights (marriage registration laws), minority rights (hindudalit communities), socio-economic rights (impoverished communities suffering from water logging and river erosion), labour rights (gender pay gap, exploited labourers). Oftentimes several journalists wrote about the same issue in different publications and as part of a coordinated effort. Three of the stories cited in evaluation feedback are summarised in boxes in this report and refer to the case of communities affected by river erosion in Barisal, a case of police corruption in Jessore, and the plight of a Bangladeshi domestic worker from Khulna in Saudi Arabia.

- Civil society efforts to promote democracy and human rights through media were also increased. CSO/NGO representatives said their ability to engage with the media had improved through practical training. This was confirmed in evaluation meetings, responses to the evaluation questionnaire as well as the project's feedback forms. As one NGO participant said:

"The training was very good, as I work for an NGO, I never had sufficient information on ethical reporting. We learnt the technique of reporting from the training. The trainer guided us how can we can better improve our technique, we learnt how to write reports for our own purpose, to write press releases, how to sharpen our focus as in the past reporters have told us that they don't always know what we are trying to say. We also learnt how to write a headline, how quotations can be used in reports, how to write a good case study, a success story and which parts to emphasise".

Another said:

"After the training whenever I write something, I think about what the focus should be, I now look at it through a journalist's eyes and think carefully when I write something"

Interviewees gave many examples of stories written as part of the training, for instance, on the land rights of tribal people, communities suffering from environmental pressures, slum dwellers, brick kiln workers, Dalit communities, and breast cancer awareness. This writing was shared through social media, for instance, Facebook, or through PowerPoint presentations.

In responding to evaluation questions, the respondents seemed to emphasise how their own learning and skills had increased rather than how they were better mobilising the established media to report on human rights issues – which was the principal project objective. One interviewee said, for example, that head office was so pleased with the improved quality of his work that he was given more writing tasks after the training. Follow-up with journalistic contacts after the training seemed more for the purpose of seeking advice on their own writing rather than with the aim of encouraging journalists to cover stories themselves.

This project outcome also envisaged increased public awareness; the evaluation could not assess this directly in anyway and nor did the project's monitoring data measure public response. However, one editor was of the opinion that public consciousness was increased in his area due to feedback received in response to human rights reports in his newspaper.

The project was implemented as planned; risks were as anticipated (the need for government approval, threats arising from fundamentalism, and weather-related risks) but none affected timely delivery. There were no unexpected challenges, inevitably organising trainings in poorly resourced areas had its difficulties but the participants were enthusiastic and open to the project and practical arrangements were made as required. The limited feedback from evaluation contributors or in the project's monitoring records on improvements mainly comprised the following suggestions from participants:

- Extend the training and allow more time for different components (e.g. field visits, critical review, in-depth discussion on specific human rights topics) or to make the course residential (this would have disadvantages in terms of increasing costs and reducing accessibility for others who would then be unable to attend);
- Ensure more than one trainer for trainings (this was usually the case but there may have been instances where one trainer was left to deliver a programme for 3-4 days);
- Involve local administrators as participants or trainers (they were usually involved in opening trainings or in handing our certificates at the end, the suggestion is here for more substantive involvement).

At its heart this was a very effective project and the following lessons can be learned from this experience:

- It was well-designed. The project targeted 12 of the most marginalised districts in the country, this was a manageable number, and meant that implementation was achieved without News Network becoming overstretched. While there may have been other ways of designing the project e.g. concentrating resources geographically, or on specific issues or beneficiary groups, the way it was designed helped create a foundation for national geographic coverage and visibility and also meant that a wide variety of human rights issues were covered instead of specifics relevant to particular localities only e.g. coastal fisherman or tribal hill communities.
- The training itself was well-structured and involved separate training sessions for journalists and CSO/NGO representatives followed by joint sessions of both groups plus editors. The content itself was highly engaging and relevant to participants teaching them about human rights but also building their professional skills; and involving both theoretical and field based training.
- The training gave a wide understanding of all dimensions of human rights, both civil-political and socio-economic rights. This led to a rich and interesting diversity in articles produced by journalists. While this was very positive, it was noted in evaluation meetings that beneficiaries sometimes had a tendency to equate all human interest stories and criminal acts to human rights stories (for instance, the abduction of a new born baby from a hospital ward by a disturbed individual or a case of a child murdered by a private individual) but without making clear links to the accountability and responsibility of duty bearers. While all dimensions of human life can in some way be linked to the human rights obligations of governments, it may help to further tease out the different types of state obligations (to respect, to protect, to fulfil) and the level of commitment required under human rights treaties (for

instance, the difference between immediately realisable civil and political rights vs progressively realisable economic, social and cultural rights) in order to help enhance the understanding of participants.

- The project was output driven. The participants came away with concrete published articles at the end of the process. In addition, the award and competition for best article held in both years of the project, 2015 and 2016, did much to invigorate human rights reporting by participants after the course was over and in a cost effective way. A total of 16 journalists were awarded approximately 110 USD each.
- The training participants came from key local players (representatives of national, regional and local media outlets), mostly from the printed press. The involvement of television, radio, new social media could be increased in future incarnations given the influential role of these media modalities.
- The training materials and techniques were effective. The training was based on a standardised 57 page training manual covering everything from training techniques through to democracy and human rights issues, the international and local context and laws, human rights mechanisms, the security and responsibility of journalists (particularly Article 57 ICT Act), defamation, use of the social media, and professional skills - preparing, authenticating, cross checking reports, handling sources etc. The training involved a combination of lectures, group work and field visits.
- Project staff and contractors (News Network staff, trainers and local coordinators) are well-regarded individuals with a national profile in some cases, and leading figures in local and national press bureaux. Overall, the project is very well embedded in the journalistic profession, a key factor in its successful implementation.
- The project itself gave due regard to human rights principles in its implementation. For example, the participant selection process was transparent and fair. The course was advertised in local papers and then participants selected through a formal application and interview process. The emphasis on promoting gender equality was a positive feature and News Network has a strong track record in this field having pioneered fellowships for female journalists in Bangladesh. In practice, numbers varied from district to district depending on the local context and the overall gender balance achieved was 440 males and 81 females. In addition, the course content included specific sessions on women's rights and the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979).

Sample press clipping

Police officer caught by public for trapping businessman

Assistant Sub-inspector Shirajul Islam and Constable Sharojit of Chowgasa Police Station in Jessore district were suspended from police duties for entrapping a local businessman with false allegations of selling the illegal drug, Yaba tablets.

Inspector Shirajul Islam with the support of his informant Akash Sheikh had previously managed to plant some Yaba tablets in an electronics shop named, 'Super Electric and Verities'. Soon after planting the tablets the inspector, the informant and the constable entered the shop. They tried to arrest the businessman but were unable to do so because local people and other businessman would not believe it was true. They pressed for the footage of the CCTV camera to be checked which confirmed that it was in fact the informant Akash who had planted the Yaba tablets in the shop. A crowd of angry people immediately surrounded the three and started beating them. The crowds blocked the roads demanding the punishment of the three culprits. After the incident, the Second officer of the Chowgasa Police Station, Wahiduzzaman, said that criminal proceedings have been commenced against the sub-inspector, constable and informant.

The report was published on 26 October 2016 in national daily newspaper, 'Jugantor'. The reporter Indrojit Roy was trained by this UNDEF funded project implemented by News Network. [Translated from Bangla to English for the evaluation report]

[Yaba is a methamphetamine-based drug, the supply of which is prohibited and highly punishable in Bangladesh. Known as the 'madness drug', its use is fast sweeping Asia with Bangladesh the frontline of the epidemic given its border with Myanmar, the main source country in the region: <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/05/asia/methamphetamine-yaba-bangladesh/index.html>]

(iii) Efficiency

The project was efficient: the budget was based on realistic costs, developed in conjunction with UNDEF, and proved adequate to the needs of the task. The cost per trainee worked out to approximately USD 400 per person for a week long training plus a follow-up day long meeting. The accountability channels were clear: UNDEF narrative and financial reports were prepared on time; News Network had to submit project audits and reports to the government on a regular basis as part of its compliance with official requirements; and internal accountability to beneficiaries was achieved through the systematic use of feedback forms.

The project's M&E system diligently captured much detailed data but did not sufficiently analyse this data to chart project progress:

- Feedback questionnaires were completed after each training session and involved open questions which amply allowed participants to give full feedback (examples of questions included what they learnt, what they liked, what they didn't like, what

recommendations they had etc.). News Network collected, read and retained these forms but did not carry out a systematic analysis of the data so while the evaluator can confirm from a random sample review of these forms, that participant responses were detailed and positive, there is no summary or quantitative analysis available.

- Press clippings were also collected by the project. Participants tended to post these to News Network which then kept most of them as hard copies in a folder and scanned some for further dissemination. Again, the clippings were not quantified or analysed.
- The project carried out a baseline survey prior to receiving UNDEF funding. The survey covered 12 districts and involved some 15-20 individuals comprised of journalists and CSO/NGO representatives. The survey questions asked respondents to self-assess their level of knowledge of human rights, prior reporting experience, level of professional skills, their opinion of the role of the media in promoting human rights etc. against a percentage-based Likert scale. No endline survey using the same questions was done.

The lack of coherence in the M&E system made it impossible to systematically compare project progress at different stages. The baseline data involved a certain set of individuals, particular questions and a quantitative scale. The feedback surveys involved a different set of individuals, different questions and qualitative data only. As such the two cannot be compared to show project progress. This is why the project is not able to substantiate the quantitative outcome indicators in the results framework – while there is no doubt that the outcomes were achieved, the hard data that could have supported these results is lacking. Moreover, the wording of the indicators themselves is problematic insofar as they do not set targets which are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound). The project was conscientious in capturing monitoring data but let itself down by then not analysing this information systematically.



Evaluation participants in Khulna

(iv) Impact

There are examples of the way the training has impacted on participants' lives, for instance, one NGO participant said,

"I used to be given culture and lifestyle stories to write but after the training with my increasing interest in human rights and democracy, my employers also changed their mind set and gave me more work and responsibility on such issues".

Another NGO participant managed to secure a part-time job on a newspaper after the training.

Participants were also motivated to take personal action on human rights abuses themselves, the evaluation heard of two cases where individuals acted to prevent cases of child marriage, one individual said:

"I was working as a teacher in the school in my village and found out that a girl of 13 years of age was about to be married off by her family. During the training we had talked about child marriage so when this happened in my community, I went to report it to the police station with some other people and we managed to get it stopped".

Evaluation contributors cited many examples of their belief that reports written by them had led to action by the authorities to remedy human rights violations:

- Participants visited a waterlogged community facing financial hardship during the training. The articles they wrote afterwards were said to have led to the micro-credit organisation concerned temporarily suspending debt collection until livelihoods recovered.
- Journalists reporting on a damaged building in a government hospital which was near collapse and a threat to patient safety, said their reports led to the hospital administration abandoning the building and moving people out.
- Articles about children lacking proper school facilities and having to be taught classes under a tree due to the derelict state of their school building reportedly led to commitments by the education department to build a new school.
- Reports about a deprived community of fisherman struggling to survive due to restrictions on fishing were said to lead to a change in policies and permission for them to fish in the local river.

As the evaluation did not meet local officials in the cases concerned, it cannot verify if any actions taken were as a result of articles stimulated by the training programme. The project claims many such impacts but without a deeper exploration, the causal link between the

training itself, the journalistic reports and the actions taken to remedy human rights violations, cannot be established. The issue of causality was discussed in evaluation meetings. In some cases, participants were able to provide more back-up as to why their writings were influential in bringing about change. For example, an NGO representative wrote an article in a local newspaper about the illegal production of charcoal by wood burning in local villages which was causing pollution of the environment. The local government environmental department took action following the report. The participant believed that the newspaper report made the difference since he had tried many times before to raise the issue with the authorities but to no avail. In another case, journalists visited a Dalit cobbler community living in deprivation without basic health and sanitation as part of their training and then wrote several articles about the situation. They claimed that the pressure of several journalists writing about this issue in local and national newspapers led to the local administration building a new road within a month. Similar examples were cited of a fishing community lacking in basic services and a coastal community deprived of accessible drinking water.

The likely reality is that while such reports may have made a contribution, other factors will have been at play which also had an influence. For instance, one example discussed during the evaluation concerned the distribution of identity cards to children in one district by local authorities as a way of preventing child marriage. While newspapers did write articles about this issue, it is evident that the intervention was the result of many activities by civil society groups, UNICEF and others. The example of newspaper reports on police brutality and corruption in Jessore shows the value in teasing out the specific contribution of the project. A number of participants in the training were involved in reporting two cases of police malpractice earlier this year which they said led to the suspension of the police officers involved (see box earlier with one of the reports). Further discussion of this case revealed that these were major local stories with many segments of the community involved, local businesses, politicians etc. It is highly likely that, regardless of the training, the journalists would have reported these stories anyway. It is therefore simplistic to draw a cause and effect between the training, the reporting and the suspension of the police officers. Rather as the evaluation respondents concluded themselves following the evaluation discussion, the contribution of the project was more nuanced:

“The police brutality story was first uncovered by a couple of us.... As we are all journalists we would have reported this issue anyway regardless of the training, it’s our professional responsibility but the training affected the way we handled it. When we got the story, we waited one day to be sure about its authenticity, and then we shared it with other journalists and agreed to publish at the same time so that the police would not target any one of us. The training taught us the importance of authenticity, of cross-checking the information and the risks to us of publishing due to Article 57. We utilised our learning in that one day.”

(v) *Sustainability*

The project has sustainable effects in terms of the learning and knowledge imparted to trainees and their continuing interest in reporting on human rights issues. The fact that the evaluation took place a year after project end and in some cases, two years after the training, was testimony to sustainability at this level as witnessed by the engagement and interest shown by participants to the evaluation.

Sustainability in terms of continuation of the training was not envisaged. This was not a Training of Trainers (ToT) course but the viability of a ToT model was explored in evaluation meetings. While some interviewees were positive about the idea of a ToT, others expressed doubts about their ability to train others without further capacity building themselves. In addition, the track record following the training is not strong; it appears that participants passed on limited information to their colleagues with no one attempting to carry out a replica of the training programme.

There is a mixed picture as to whether the project led to a sustainable network between participants after the training. In limited places like Khulna and Dinajpur, there is an active online network using Facebook as a platform through which information is shared. The Khulna Facebook group has some 150 members and is facilitated by 3 journalists who act as moderators. The project encouraged participants in all districts to set up such networks but not all have taken the initiative and are waiting for the lead of an external coordinator. Aside from formalised networks in one or two places, ongoing relations between participants, particularly between journalists and CSOs/NGOs are down to personal relations. There were strong differences of opinion between participants as to whether relations had improved, with some believing they had:

"We had contacts with journalists before but these became more frequent after the event, the significant change that through using social media like Facebook, both journalists and CSO representatives frequently share incidents, this is a remarkable achievement".

However, others disagreed:

"There is no opportunity to communicate more with NGOs, it is still limited to professional relations, when NGOs need journalists to cover stories they contact them, when journalists need info they contact NGOs, I don't think much has changed".

News Network built in a follow-up day as part of the project in which it encouraged participants to share their activities since the training and to form networks among themselves. However, it did not keep up regular contacts with former trainees thereafter, for instance, through newsletters or mail outs through a list serve, citing lack of funding.

(vi) UNDEF added value

UNDEF funding enabled this idea to come to fruition: News Network has carried out training programmes before for journalists but this is the first training offering a comprehensive training package on professional skills and human rights to joint groups of rural journalists and CSO/NGOs. This is said to be one of the few courses in Bangladesh to combine human rights and journalism training; where such courses exist they may cover human rights in an ad hoc way or only cover certain angles, for instance, child rights or sustainable development goals rather than the comprehensive treatment given by this programme.

UNDEF is recognised in all training materials and beneficiaries were aware of its role as the project funder. News Network staff, trainers and local coordinators were convinced of the added value of UNDEF funding this project, saying that funding from the UN as a highly respected organisation makes a difference. UN funding is seen as independent and serving a global agenda whereas bilateral donors may be perceived as partisan and self-interested – a project like this could be undermined if it is seen as external political interference. The beneficiaries took a different view and were unanimous in saying that the source of the funds didn't matter, one spoke for many others in saying:

"Education is the important thing, which institution provides the training is not that important, whenever we have the opportunity, we just want to receive the training".

Sample press clipping
Dreams of Sufia Shattered

Sufia Khatun (39) left behind her three children in the care of her husband before going off to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker in search of a better income and life. Before leaving the country she undertook a month long training. Everything went well. Sufia started work in the house of an influential Saudi family as a domestic help but within a couple of days Sufia started having concerns about her employer's behaviour. She informed her family members that she was facing various kinds of abuse including physical assault. So, Sufia wanted to get back home.

It was very difficult for her to fight the abuse. Life became hellish and traumatic. One day she left the house but didn't know where to go or who could help her. She was disconnected from everyone. Her family became very concerned about her. Her children were anxious about whether they would ever see their mother again. Nobody came forward to support them. Later the recruitment agency which had taken Sufia to Bangladesh informed them that Sufia was now in Saudi police custody and would be deported to Bangladesh in a week or so. Sufia has now returned home but with her dream completely shattered. Shattered and exhausted! Now she is living in Khulna city, a southern divisional headquarters of Bangladesh.

Report was published in a national daily 'Sangram'. The Reporter AbdurRazzak Khan was trained by this UNDEF funded project implemented by News Network. Khan is also one of journalists who won a project media award. [Translated from Bangla to English for the evaluation report].

V. Conclusions and recommendations

The project is highly relevant; it was much needed given the context of human rights abuses and suppression of the media. Moreover, it was also appropriate, despite external constraints, there is sufficient democratic space for the project to be viable. As evidenced by the project itself, journalists were able to write about a range of human rights issues and call duty-bearers to account.

The project has been **effective** in meeting its objectives: the skills of journalists in relation to human rights issues have been enhanced, reporting on human rights has increased, and civil society capacity to understand how the media works has improved – though more work remains in facilitating a closer engagement between CSOs/NGOs and the media.

The project was carried out in time and funds were used in an efficient manner according to the planned budgetmaking for **efficient** delivery. The M&E system involved the diligent collection of project implementation data but this was not sufficiently analysed to demonstrate project progress. Moreover, the lack of coherence between different monitoring activities and insufficient precision in the wording of outcome indicators meant that the project was unable to backup the evident progress made with hard quantitative data.

For a short-term low budget initiative, the project has done well to contribute to **tangible impacts**. Aside from the direct impacts on the lives of trainees, project participants cited many examples of the way articles on human rights issues stimulated by the project, reportedly led to action by duty-bearers to address human rights violations. While this evaluation is unable to verify the causal links between the training and ultimate action by the authorities, especially given the likely complexity of factors, players and motives involved in such situations, it seems evident that journalistic outputs encouraged by the project contributed in some part to changes on the ground.

The project has **sustainable** effects at personal level on the individuals involved. Beyond that, sustainability is more sporadic. There is little evidence that participants did much to share learning from the project with other colleagues, for instance, through talks or offshoot training sessions. Ongoing networking between project participants is only happening in a limited number of districts where online forums are being used to exchange information. Elsewhere, participants have not seized the initiative to continue collaboration. While the project encouraged the establishment of networks, it could perhaps have done more to embed these during the project life.

Overall this was a very sound investment for UNDEF in a well-structured project which has yielded concrete dividends and laid the foundation for a nationwide network of journalists, particularly in rural marginalised areas. **UNDEF funding added value** as it enabled a new

and original training programme to be implemented under the umbrella of a respected organisation in Bangladesh.

In terms of considerations for future direction for News Network, its model of training works and merits replication in other districts or with journalists/NGOs in existing districts who have yet to participate in such trainings. While there were many calls from past beneficiaries for more training for themselves, it seems difficult to justify further investment in training the same candidates at a time of scarce resource – they have already benefitted from an expert and comprehensive training package and been brought to a level where they are able to write effective human rights reports, as shown by their own testimonies. Rather the emphasis on past participants should be on engaging them in a self-sustaining low cost and easy to manage alumni network which does not depend on News Network resources for ongoing maintenance. Given the value of the training to beneficiaries in terms of building up professional skills, trainees and their organisations might be persuaded to take more ownership for follow-up as a quid pro quo for joining the training.

On the question of whether a Training of Trainers model would be suitable for disseminating knowledge and information. It is worth bearing in mind the heavy investment that would be required to build the capacity of journalists and CSO/NGO workers to become trainers since this entails training them on professional reporting skills, human rights issues as well as training skills. The quality of training down the chain would be difficult to control. Moreover, the dissemination of the training would depend on the willingness of receiving organisations (newspapers and NGOs) to finance and support a cascade training programmes. One person gave a realistic response as to the viability of a ToT:

“There would be lots of uncertainty, if I received training as a master trainer and was set to deliver a training event and then a big incident occurred, my first responsibility would be to cover the story rather than deliver the training”.

While a conventional ToT model seems unsuitable for this context, there is scope for developing a small cadre of professional trainers. The trainers on the programme itself, as professional journalists, expressed the need for more training for themselves on training skills. In addition, there may possibilities for developing a few former trainees as co-trainers. The prospect for integrating this course into formal journalistic training in colleges and universities has not yet been explored. There was widespread call to the evaluation for more training, including the training of more journalists. The project may look to other options also, for instance, guidebooks or online courses, for example, to reach a greater number in a cost efficient way.

The project’s own experience shows the power of collective action; with journalists able to effect change through coordinated reporting and pressure from different quarters. The vision of a sustainable network at district level and beyond is therefore an important aim. News

Network also has ideas for further developing the project including through a programme aimed at women's empowerment and specifically a fellowship programme for female journalists. Another idea is to further develop human rights reporting through social media and citizen journalism and particularly by reaching out to young people.

The evaluation makes a limited number of **key recommendations** directed at News Network; there are further suggestions and ideas for taking the work forward in the body of the report. The recommendations relate to the conclusions above and include some explanatory wording and suggestions for implementation.

1. Replicate the training programme

This training should cover participants in the same districts who did not participate before, or reach out to new districts.

2. Further disseminate training content

As the full training programme may not be able to reach all those who need it, News Network should find other ways of disseminating the content of the training. While a fully-fledged ToT is unlikely to work, News Network could focus on developing a small cadre of trainers who can be used for training programmes or who show a willingness to carry out offshoot trainings themselves. This should include existing trainers and also candidates recruited from past participants on a selective basis. The training of trainers could involve short courses coupled with opportunities to learn on the job through co-training opportunities. In addition, the production of a short guidebook and encouragement of participants to use this to educate colleagues back in their organisations would also help dissemination. The idea of an online course is also worth exploring.

3. Establish an alumni network

Past participants should be facilitated to organise themselves into networks using social media tools such as Facebook or local platforms, such as local press bureaux for face to face meetings. News Network will need to assess how best this can be done particularly with the intent of establishing self-sustaining networks. News Network can continue to find ways of engaging and stimulating past participants through regular information dissemination itself (e.g. newsletters), through competitions and awards for article-writing, through soliciting the involvement of past participants in future events as presenters or co-trainers selected on a competitive basis depending on past performance. News Network would also benefit from establishing a regular means of contact with former trainees, for instance, through a list serve that is not heavily dependent on funding, so that continuity is maintained between grants.

4. Strengthen the M&E system

News Network made much effort to collect rich and interesting data but was let down by not analysing this data sufficiently to provide evidence of progress. Moreover, the overall M&E system needs more coherence, so that projects are able to measure the same indicators at the beginning and the end to show progress. This could have been done in various ways, for instance, by using the same framework for baseline and endline data collection, or by pre and post training questionnaires, or only post training questionnaires but with quantitative indicators to better capture progress. The indicators should also be SMART. News Network should also consider impact in more depth in terms of researching and analysing the relationship between cause and effect, in order to show the linkages between project activities and ultimate action by duty bearers to remedy human rights abuses.



Newsroom Shomayer Khabar, Khulna

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Documents Reviewed:

Article 19, Bangladesh Violations against Journalists and Online Activists in 2016, available at: <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/38729/en/bangladesh:-violations-against-journalists-and-online-activists-in-2016>

News Network, 2015-2016, Project mid-term and final narrative and financial reports to UNDEF

News Network, 2015-2016, unpublished sample feedback forms, baseline survey responses, training materials and published press clippings from various sources

Reporters without Borders, 2017, World Press Freedom Index 2017, available at: <https://rsf.org/en/>

UNDP Bangladesh, 2017, About Bangladesh, webpage available at: <http://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/countryinfo.html>

US State Department, 2016, Bangladesh 2016 Human Rights Report, available at: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265744.pdf>

Annex 2: Persons Interviewed

| 24 September 2017 | |
|--------------------|---|
| Arrival | |
| 25 September 2017 | |
| Interview | Project Trainers - Mr. Ziaur Rahman; Mr. Shamsuddin Ahmed |
| Interview | News Network Staff - Mr. Shahiduz Zaman (CEO) and Mr. Rezaul Karim (Programme Manager). |
| 26 September 2017 | |
| Travel | Dhaka to Jessore |
| Group Meeting | Jessore CSO/NGO representatives (11 participants - 10 men, 1 woman) |
| Group Meeting | Jessore journalists (11 persons - 9 men, 2 women) |
| Group Meeting | Jessore Editors (7 persons, all men) |
| Interview | Local Coordinator - Mr. Farazi Ahmed Sayed Bulbul |
| Travel | Jessore to Khulna |
| 27 September 2017 | |
| Group Meeting | Khulna-based CSO/NGO representatives (13 persons (7 men, 6 women) |
| Group Meeting | Khulna-based Journalists (14 persons - 12 men, 2 women) |
| Group Meeting | Khulna-based Editors (4 persons - all male) |
| Interview | Local coordinator - Mr. Sheikh DidarulAlam |
| Observation | Visit to newspaper offices – Shomayer Khabar |
| 28 September 2017 | |
| Travel | Khulna – Jessore – Dhaka |
| Interviews | News Network staff – as above |
| Documentary review | Inspection of original documents held at News Network office |
| 29 September 2017 | |
| Interview | UNDP - Ms. Mahmuda Afroz, Ms. Sharmeela Rassool |
| 30 September 2017 | |
| Return travel | |