

# Empowering Journalists for Quality Journalism

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**C**OMpletely landlocked between China and Russia, Mongolia is one of the sparsely populated countries in the world. It embraced democracy by guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of its citizens in the 1992 Constitution.

Mongolian journalists and media played a great role in the democratic movement that started at the end of 1980s. One of the demands of the first political hunger strike in March 1990 was liberalization of the government-controlled broadcast media, the only one existing in the country at that time.

On its path towards media freedom, Mongolia has seen some inspiring developments but has also faced major setbacks. Following the political transition in 1990, print media sprang up extensively, and since the late 1990s a host of electronic media programs were launched. As a result of the 1998 Media Freedom Law, government-owned newspapers were privatized and the only Mongolian radio and TV stations at that time were converted into public broadcasting service companies according to the Law on the Public and Radio and Television passed by the Parliament in 2005.

The actual media output in the capital as well as the countryside is impressive both in number and variety. According to the Mongolian Press Institute survey, there were 446 media outlets at the end of 2016 serving a population of 3.1 million people, 25 percent of them operating in the rural areas. The number of news websites radically increased to ninety-six websites in 2016. More than sixty TV stations are located in Ulaanbaatar, the capital, out of recorded total of two hundred eighty broadcast stations all over the country. The number of daily newspapers dropped from sixteen to fourteen. A total of 4,716 media practitioners work in the media field and 66 percent are journalists. Six newspapers are published in English and other foreign languages.

## Journalism Education in Mongolia

Since the collapse of communism, Mongolia has faced the challenge of building an entirely new media system that meets the requirements of a



Mongolia journalists covering an event.

young democratic state. While inspired by the social and political changes, Mongolian journalists had to learn the concept and principles of democratic journalism. The training of journalists and media management training are vital parts in the equation. For this reason many multilateral organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Mongolia have been extraordinarily active in Mongolia in terms of journalism training over the past years.

Until 1990, journalism was only taught at the State University of Mongolia. The State University of Mongolia started only one class on journalism for the first time in 1961. By now, a total of seventeen journalism colleges and universities offer journalism courses in Ulaanbaatar and most of them are privately run. On average, these schools have a total student body of around 1,500 students at any given time.

The curriculum and course syllabuses of those schools were developed in compliance with Journalism bachelor education standard approved by a resolution of the National Council of Standardization and Metrology in 2003. Therefore, the contents of these curriculums are similar. However, each school has a right to develop and enrich curriculum content depending on their schools' specifics. Thus, schools improve their curriculums every two to three years which have to be verified by the Professional Education

Authority of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports. About 25-35 percent of all courses taught in the undergraduate journalism program are about democratic ideals and their development. For example, the General Education courses include subjects on History of Mongolia, Politics, Theory of Economics, Contemporary International Relations, and Basics of State and Justice. The Journalism Foundation courses have subjects on Mass Communication Theory, International Journalism, History of Mongolian Journalism, Investigative Journalism, Civic Journalism and Practical Journalism. Most universities have their own studio, computer laboratory and reporters' facilities.

The Journalism Higher Education Organization of Mongolia supported the publication in 2010 of the Mongolian language version of the UNESCO series on journalism education entitled *Model Curricula for Journalism Education in Developing Countries & Emerging Democracies* translated by the Press Institute of Mongolia. Copies of the publication were distributed to university instructors. Within the framework of the project, seven Basic Journalism and Practical Journalism class syllabuses were improved and the Curriculums for Development Journalism were done anew. Professors and tutors of ten public and private universities worked as a team in developing the seven journalism syllabuses of universities. Currently, most Journalism Schools (except the State University of Mongolia) follow the "Model Curricula for Journalism Education (eight classes) in Mongolia."

The UNESCO study entitled *The Mongolian Media Landscape. Sector Analysis* conducted by Media Consultant Anke Redl, CMM Intelligence (China) and Associate Professor Poul Erik Nielsen, University of Aarhus, Denmark published in December 2006 states:<sup>1</sup>

While there are a great number of journalism schools, there are no media management courses. Fifteen years since Mongolia's move to democracy, there is still little to no understanding of how to manage and grow an independent and balanced media outlet that exists for the sake of providing free and independent information or for the sake of being a business in itself, without having to depend on political and/or business support.

This conclusion remains valid until now.

The 2016 report entitled *Assessment of Media Development of Mongolia*<sup>2</sup> that used the UNESCO Media Development Indicators notes that<sup>3</sup>

Most of the training mentioned under indicator 4.1 has targeted junior to medium-ranking reporters rather than managers. The first major training event targeting media managers was in 1998, when the World Association of Newspapers, in cooperation with the Mongolian Publishers' Association and with the support of the Free Press Foundation (a DANIDA-established independent printing house), conducted a newspaper management training which resulted in the launch of the first newspaper advertisements. In the following years between 2000 and 2014, about 10 training events were organized by the Press Institute specifically for media executives. In 2012, GIC [Global International Center] trained ten community radio managers in their workplace.

This UNESCO-funded assessment also gives an overview of professional media training:<sup>4</sup>

In 1996, the Mongolian Free Democratic Journalists Association organized the first training course for a wide range of media workers introducing the principles of media independence and professionalism and describing the role of a free, pluralist and professional media in a democracy and for election coverage. Since then, three non-academic institutions had been the main players in systematically providing training courses on democratic and professional journalism: the Mongolian Journalists Association, the Press Institute (PI) and Globe International Center (GIC). Most of these training events have been made possible through the assistance of international donors, including bilateral donors (DANIDA, USAID, JICA, SIDA), the European Union (TASIS programme, EC projects), overseas foundations (the Asia Foundation, Open Society Institute, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung), international governmental organizations (IGOs) (UNESCO, UNDP, WB) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs).

The training topics include a wide range of issues on democracy and development such as good governance, anti-corruption, anti-violence, social justice, equality as well as reporting on human rights, politics, economy, business, gender, environment etc. Investigative journalism has been a part

of the training program of Globe International Center (GIC) which started with the UNESCO IPDC (International Programme for the Development of Communication) project in 2005 in cooperation with the Zorig Foundation and Press Institute.

A number of the training programs offered by the international projects as part of their information and communication programs include the issues of good governance, economy, environment, health, etc.

However, apart from the heavy investment in mid-career training and despite almost all journalists being able to cite the virtues of a free and responsible press, the standard of Mongolian journalism has very little improvement in the interim.

The assessment of the media development was undertaken by GIC in cooperation with the Confederation of Mongolian Journalists, Press Institute and Transparency Fund in 2015.

### **Legal environment for the Mongolian media**

In 2002, GIC conducted the first ever study on Mongolian laws and the media in cooperation with Article 19, a London-based international NGO and published the report entitled *"Mongolia in Transition. Legal Analysis of the Domestic Legislation Affecting Freedoms of Expression and Information."* Since that time, GIC remained the most active group in reviewing the national laws and advocating for favorable legal environment for the media.

The Mongolian Constitution guarantees its citizens the right to publish and freedoms of expression and information. The 1998 Law on Media Freedom bans censorship, prohibits the government from owning media outlets and states that the Parliament shall not adopt any laws restricting media freedom. The law also obliges the media outlets to take responsibility for their publications and programs.

The Law on Information Transparency and Right to Information (LITRI), passed on 16 June 2011, was ranked 65th in the global right to information rating (out of 111 countries).<sup>5</sup>

Under Article 18 of the LITRI, information will not be made public (1) if there are well-grounded reasons that the public release of the concerned information might be detrimental to the national security and public interest of Mongolia (18.1.1), (2) if the concerned information is related to matters under review by the Mongol Bank, the Financial Regulatory Commission,

or by the state administrative organizations in charge of competition or specialized inspection (18.1.2), and (3) if it is necessary to protect state secrets, organizations and/or individuals during the process of inquiry, investigation and prosecution (18.1.3). LITRI also protects intellectual property (Article 19), personal secrets (Article 20) and secrets of any organization or business entity (article 21). Disclosure of intellectual property-related information is prohibited without the permission by the owner (19.1).

The regime of exceptions of LITRI is problematic for the following reasons:

- It fails to protect key confidentiality interests and renders confidential some issues that should be open;
- Many exceptions are not harm-based; and
- There is no public interest override to ensure that information of significant public interest is disclosed.

GIC lobbied for the enactment of this law for seven years. In practice, the implementation of the law is very weak and awareness of the citizens and public officials on the law is still poor.

### **Civil and Criminal Defamation**

Reputation is protected by civil and criminal defamation laws. GIC's free expression monitoring reports reveal that there were twenty-seven criminal defamation cases between 2005 and 2012, but only seventeen in 2013-2015.<sup>6</sup> All the plaintiffs of criminal defamation cases in Mongolia were elected authorities, powerful public officials and public organizations including the Speaker of the Parliament, Prime Minister and Ministers. For example, in the criminal defamation case filed by Prime Minister N. Altankhuyag against an editor-in-chief and two other journalists, the Chilgeltei District Court convicted the defendants and fined them twenty million Mongolian Tughrik (MNT) (approximately 11,000 US dollars) with three-month imprisonment in case of failure to pay the fine. The Supreme Court sustained the decision of the Appeals Court and fined Defendants with over fourteen million MNT (approximately 7,800 US dollars).

Criminal defamation has become alarming for social media users. On 18 August 2014, the Initial Court found Ts. Bat, a Twitter blogger, guilty of insulting and libelling A. Gansukh, the Minister of Road and Transportation.

Ts. Bat was arrested and detained for three months and ten days. On appeal, the court decided on 9 September 2014 to further investigate the case and released Ts. Bat on bail.

In 2017, a new Criminal Law repealed the provisions on libel and insult. The Law on Administrative Offenses now imposes fines equal to 2,000,000 MNT to individuals and 20,000,000 MNT to legal entities for disclosing and distributing through mainstream and social media information defaming the honor and dignity of a person. However, general criminal defamation remains under the new Criminal Law.

Reputation is protected by Article 497 of the Civil Code, but there are two main problems: 1) the law allows public bodies to bring defamation legal action and 2) places the onus on the person who disseminated the allegedly defamatory statement to prove that information was “accurate” or that it was “truthful”. This poses a significant burden on the defendant and has a chilling effect on freedom of expression.

### **Freedom of Expression During Elections**

On 25 December 2015, the new Election Law was enacted and it integrated the regulations of the previous Parliamentary and Presidential elections. Article 70 titled “Prohibition of the Illegal Campaigns” imposes more restrictions on media, online and messaging spaces by prohibiting them from distributing any type of information which is false, libelous or insulting and any type of activities with purpose of “determining political ranking” (Article 70.1.6), or “call on citizens to refrain from voting” (Article 70.5.7). Furthermore, a ban is placed on printing or publication of news, pictures and materials of any type as well as broadcast of songs related to religion in election broadcast programs that disseminate false information, and materials that are libelous and insulting to people (Article 70.5.13). Media bodies are required to sign an agreement and pledge not to release all types of information and news about any parties participating in the election, during the election campaign (Article 70.7).

Sanctions against media are included in various parts of the Election Law, such as the following:

- A media body found guilty by a court of disseminating, publishing and airing “flashy” and false information on parties, coalitions and

candidates, shall reimburse the expenses spent for the campaign (Article 70.8);

- In case websites breach the provision against “determining political ranking” (Article 70.1.6), the Communications and Regulatory Committee (CRC) shall terminate the license for six months based on the conclusion of the government administrative organization responsible for fair competition;
- Radio and television stations that breach the law shall be warned once; but repeated violations would allow the organization which issued their license to order their operations to stop until the voting day (Article 82.19);
- In the case of the breaches specified in this chapter, license of the broadcasters shall be terminated until six months from the day breach occurred (Article 82.21);
- In case, the identity of the bodies and media individuals who breached this provision could not be determined, the website shall be blocked until the end of the voting by the regulatory body (Article 83.7);
- Procedures on election campaigns on radio and television and on their monitoring shall be adopted by the Central Election Organization and the CRC in accordance with Article 82.17. The CRC shall monitor election advertising and may take measures to prevent violations of the law or stop the violations in cooperation with police, election organizations and specialized non-governmental organizations (Article 82.18).

The involvement of the government entities (Authority for the Fair Competition and Customers and the CRC) on election campaigns through the media encourages government censorship, in violation of the Media Freedom Law.

### **Safety of Journalists**

Mongolia does not have legal protection for whistleblowers or for journalists' confidential sources, and it tends to prohibit journalists from remaining anonymous.

The Globe International Center (GIC), which has been monitoring free expression violations since 2005 and produces the annual *Media Freedom Report*, recorded three hundred thirty-two violations of journalists' professional rights during the 2011-2016 period. This is not the complete number of violations because many journalists do not publicly report them. The number of court cases against journalists increased to fifty-two during the 2011-2016 period. In 2016, 52.5 percent of cases of violations out of a total of sixty-one cases were against websites and the social media, 26.2 percent against broadcast media, 14.8 percent against print and 6.5 percent against individuals and freelancers. More than 57 percent of free expression violators are politicians, high government authorities, public officials and public bodies.

### Globe International Center and Journalism Training

GIC was founded in 1999 with the mission of supporting Mongolian democracy and civil society by spreading the power of information and knowledge. Its vision is to establish a democratic culture, with informed and empowered citizens.

Besides Ulaanbaatar, GIC operates in eight *aimags* (provinces) and twenty remote *soums* (provincial districts). In ten *soums* of four western *aimags* where national and ethnic minorities dominate, GIC established community radios with the support of UNESCO, Beijing Cluster.

GIC strongly believes that information leads to change and the public's right to free expression, access to information and free and independent media are essential to consolidating and developing a democratic, civil, and healthy society which respects human rights and truly serves the public.

Its strategic message is "Informed People are Powerful" which translates into considering the media as the primary source of information for the people. Necessarily, an independent media is essential; and without access to accurate public information, citizens are not aware of their rights and freedoms.

GIC's strategy is organized through complementary and inter-related programs:

1. Supporting the rights of independent media to play a leading role in the development of democracy and society. The program priorities are free expression monitoring and legal aid to journalists,

the creation of a more favorable media legal framework, media and elections, media and gender, community media, specialized and investigative reporting;

2. Promoting Good and Transparency Governance to improve governance and social accountability in public institutions that would enable them to provide a truly good public service. The program priorities are promotion of government transparency and social accountability, and community development and civic engagement;
3. Empowering the Public through Information and Communication and Arts is aimed at education and community-level communication systems supportive of the creation of an environment for citizens to exercise their rights. The priorities under this program are the use of the United Nations human rights mechanisms for human rights advocacy, anti-corruption legislation awareness raising, fighting gender-based violence and protection of human rights defenders.

GIC conducts various studies, surveys and monitoring of media-related issues including the implementation of the Right to Information (RTI) Law. It also holds capacity-building activities to train ordinary citizens on monitoring government transparency. GIC has been conducting media monitoring on presidential and parliamentary elections coverage since 2004. It lobbied for the enactment of the Law on the Public Radio and Television for five years and monitored the transition process of the state broadcasting office into a public service institution in 2006.

GIC translated the UNESCO Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media and piloted it on the Mongolian National Broadcaster (MNB), Mongolian public service broadcasting company, Ulaanbaatar Broadcasting System (UBS), a private TV channel and Confederation of Mongolian Journalists as well conducted a comparative content analysis of coverage about women politicians in media in 2012.

Since its establishment, GIC has been the NGO most actively advocating the issues of freedom of expression (namely, public service broadcasting, protection of sources, freedom of information, decriminalization of defamation, state secrecy law reform, community media), and directly engaged in attending the sessions of the United Nations human rights mechanisms.

GIC is the Secretariat of the National Committee of UNESCO's International Program for Development of Communication (IPDC).

## **Empowering the Journalists**

Over the last fifteen years, GIC has trained more than one thousand journalists through more than forty workshops and training programs.

With four out of five founders of GIC being former journalists, GIC believes that a strong and independent journalist is able to produce accurate and powerful stories that truly serve the public interest.

The small media market in Mongolia is highly saturated; there is no fair market competition and economic conditions do not allow media to thrive as business. Influential politicians and business groups close to those in power own most of media outlets. Training at the journalism schools and NGOs tends to focus on how to operate in an ideal, professional media market, rather than on the one that actually exists. Once graduates are released into the world, they find that the skills they were taught at university do not apply to the conditions they have to operate in. The situation is aggravated by the financial dependence of journalists on the local government, as is often the case in the rural areas, or by the small community environment where journalists dare not speak freely for fear of being ostracized from their community.

Despite all the challenges and problems, GIC strives to empower the journalists and promote quality journalism. Powerful journalists play a vital role in the editorial culture and are a value to any media outlet.

The journalists are vulnerable when they are ill-informed about their duties and are unaware of ethical, responsible and accountable journalism.

The GIC strategy in empowering journalists is based on the 3Ms: *Medeeleltei* (Informed), *Medlegtei* (Knowledgeable) and *Mergeshsen* (Specialized).

Foremost to a journalist's everyday job, is being informed of political, economic and social matters - understanding international media and journalistic communities.

Secondly, journalists should be knowledgeable about the environment (legal and otherwise) they work in, and the conditions for effective media. They should have the know-how to protect themselves and ensure their own safety and security.

Journalists should specialize on topics they cover to gain community confidence as well as public trust. The journalists should be human rights-sensitive while covering political, economic and social issues.

GIC holds general training programs on professional reporting associated with topics on ethical, responsible and accountable journalism. As part of specialized reporting, GIC educates on reporting on human and disability rights, gender, elections, mining issues, court trials, etc. It cooperates with the Independent Agency against Corruption (IAAC) and other civil society organizations on educating the journalists on anti-corruption legislation and issues.

Digital security and safety are essential elements of the GIC programs. Workshops on corruption risks associated with mining sector and digital security have been held in cooperation with Marcel Oomens from the Dutch NGO Free Press Unlimited and funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Mongolia.

The first GIC training on human rights reporting was organized in 2002 with the support of the United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Six selected female columnists from six daily newspapers based in the capital were trained on how to cover child and women issues. Since then, GIC has published educational materials that included issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, persons with disabilities, women participation in decision-making as well as how to use the UN human rights mechanisms.

The development of investigative journalism is a leading priority of professional training in Mongolia. With UNESCO funding in 2005, GIC organized the first investigative journalism training in cooperation with the Zorig Foundation and the Press Institute, under the banner of "Media for Transparent Governance." Workshops promoted discussion and conveyed ideas on how to develop investigative journalism in Mongolia.

GIC subsequently organized two basic investigative reporting training for forty journalists from Ulaanbaatar and the provinces. Following-on, four teachers of the Press Institute held hands-on workshops for Ulaanbaatar-based journalists that led to the formation of four collaborative projects that gathered information for corruption stories in education, health, environment and economic sectors. The course deepened the knowledge for journalists on research, data analysis, building a database, finding sources, and improvement of investigative techniques. The workshops employed the

principles of teamwork and innovation. Since teamwork was not widely recognized by journalists, there was an initial difficulty in creating an atmosphere of trust and understanding. However, due to the efforts of trainers, journalists saw the benefits of teamwork.

The journalists' research reports were translated into English and sent to international expert, Yvonne Chua, from the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. She later came to Mongolia and conducted consultancy training: "Packaging Stories for Investigative Journalism." Following her evaluation of the four teams' investigative reports, she stressed to the journalists the importance of:

1. Independent verification of allegations made by human sources or documents through multiple sourcing (e.g., the health team relied only on the letter alleging wrongdoing against the former Chief Executive Officer [CEO]);
2. Adequate research to understand the law, processes and systems before launching investigations (e.g., the environment team failed to study fully the law and decrees/orders on protected areas. The agriculture team has not checked international standards);
3. Providing context (e.g., the health team still did not know much about the history of the company and the former CEO);
4. Adequate documentation (e.g., the education team was unable to photograph the transactions between the applicant and middleperson); and
5. Obtaining as much information as possible from important sources at first meeting (e.g., the agriculture team assumed it would be given a copy of the full report, only to discover that the state inspector later refused to cooperate after premature publication of the report summary).

The differences between the evidence the journalists gathered and the evidence that investigators gather was explained. The teams had difficulty organizing data and structuring stories. Many struggled with their leads, tended to bury the findings of their investigations in the stories and failed to appreciate the importance of adding color to the stories through succinct quotes, anecdotes and descriptions. Some journalists tended to editorialize, opine or include unverified information or rumors. Some journalists ac-

knowledge that these practices put the press in bad light - and now understood why readers tended to think that news reports were based on rumors.

As a result of these workshops, four teams of twenty journalists developed corruption stories, and three of the twelve investigative materials were produced for radio programs and articles for newspapers.

Members of the team who worked on an entrance examinations bribery case refused the publication of their stories, for fear that the law would not protect them - even through their solid evidence would stand up in court. The journalists could not be forced to take risk, so instead wrote: "Freedom to Journalists!" This story and other materials were published by the daily newspaper *Ardyn Erkh* under the banner "Corruption is Everybody's Concern."

Five years later, GIC returned to investigative journalism training. This time, with the support of a UNESCO grant and use of its manual entitled "*Inquiry-based Story*" which the Press Institute translated into Mongolian. GIC organized a three-day "Train the Trainers" workshop in October 2011 that involved a mixed group of seventeen journalism teachers, working journalists and Globe International trainers. The sessions were ably assisted by Georgia's ILIA University Professor Mr. Oleg Panfilov. Through its e-mailing list, GIC extended invitations to more than a thousand reporters and teachers and selected applicants based on several criteria, including: commitment and experience in investigative reporting.

The local trainers conducted the two residential workshops for Ulaanbaatar and provincial journalists. The sessions revealed a number of factors affecting their investigations. The main issues as identified by the participants consist of the following:

- Mongolian journalists are highly engaged in self-censorship because of outside pressures;
- Political censorship is increasing;
- Need to develop the media free from economic pressure;
- Journalists' organizations need to be strong and protective of their members;
- Journalists need education on the media legal framework;
- Journalists should unite in their efforts and reinforce the campaign for a more favorable legal environment;
- Journalists need legal protection and their right to investigate should be legally guaranteed;

- Journalists write and expose the facts about corruption, but police and judiciary take no action on the cases that have been exposed; and
- Journalists should cooperate with the civil society organizations to promote greater efficiency.



Local trainers on investigative reporting together with Georgian trainer, Mr. Oleg Panfilov.

Investigative journalism in Mongolia is still underdeveloped and it is encouraging to see the Press Institute seriously taking this matter up with Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA) support, and a group of journalists establishing the Investigative Journalism Center (EREN). It is hoped that more journalists and the public would realize the need to lobby for a friendly legal environment for the media. GIC sees it as vital for journalists to get involved in its current campaign to strike down anti-media laws, promote press freedom and the right to information.

GIC started election reporting training in 2004, and in 2009, with the assistance of a trainer from the Kiev Office of Internews International, organized a training on how to run an efficient televised debate during the Presidential Elections.

With UNESCO funding, GIC started working with Kazakh journalists in 2005. The project involved a weekly training for media practitioners in Kazakh aimag Bayan-Olgii with the participation of BBC and GIC experts.

Subsequently four selected trainees from Bayan-Olgii went for studies at the journalism department of the Kazakh State University in 2005. In 2006, one professional cameraman from Olgii TV was dispatched to Radio Television Malaysia to up-grade his skills. Later, GIC selected four Kazakh journalists for internship in the national media outlets that included the Mongolian National Radio and TV and the biggest daily newspaper *Udriin Sonin*, to give them opportunities to improve their professional skills. GIC also held training for members of minority communities as well as for journalists of Uvs aimag where ethnic minorities such as Durvod, Bayad and Khoton dominate.

Since 2015, GIC has been focused on training the media on social accountability mechanisms and reporting on governance issues.

The results and recommendations of GIC studies, surveys and results of monitoring provided information on the trainees' needs and topics of training programs.



Trainees of the community radio workshop interview members of the Kazakh community.

## **Training Modules and Methodology**

GIC aims to offer journalists efficient and innovative programs and in doing so carefully designs education formats - the first element for successful training. In 2012-2014, GIC organized four regional investigative reporting trainings for the rural journalists while it offered weekly face-to-face training for Ulaanbaatar journalists. Selected reporters came to the GIC office weekly for legal consultation and to get more information on the topics they were working on.

Field trips have taken journalists to a wide range of small and medium-sized enterprises - from kindergartens to artisan mines and chicken farms - to gain first-hand experience of issues affecting those industries.

GIC's instructive method called "Information Points" involves four to five experts or stakeholders who extensively discuss with journalists the issues in the training program. During the training on reporting issues associated with persons with visual impairment, journalists had a chance to talk



Field visit to Taragt soum of Uvurkhangai aimag where seabuckthorn plants thrive.

to a blind computer trainer, massage therapist, musician and teacher and human rights activist. At the training on citizens' participation in making administrative decisions, GIC invited a government official, a lawyer, a judge and a civil society expert.

Another method occasionally used is the game "How to Produce TV Talk Shows" where journalists play different roles including herder, NGO leader, and others. Indeed, the people represented in the roles are information sources for journalists producing news and other media products.



Digital security session with Trainer Marcel Oomens, Free Press Unlimited.

Using “Arts” as an effective educational tool, GIC has produced human rights documentaries, videos and slideshows to demonstrate corruption, with follow-up discussion for learning reinforcement.

The “dialogue training method” was first used in civil society training in 2004 on how to conduct media campaign. Journalists were invited to attend the discussions of a mixed journalist-civil society activist group. Participants had a great opportunity to learn from each other and became aware of the human rights issues that some NGOs work on. Rural journalists and members of the local police force participated in domestic violence training and in 2016, GIC organized “Media and Civil Society Dialogue on Domestic Violence” using civil society expertise and with Austrian government support.

Beyond journalism trainings, GIC also runs programs for public officials, lawyers, citizens, and youth groups. To demonstrate and engage the students of law schools and secondary schools on issues around corruption, it developed two modules using images from a twenty-eight anti-corruption episodic TV series. The TV episodes narrating twelve corruption stories were produced by private channel NTV, as a public awareness-raising component of a project funded by Asia Foundation. For the secondary school program, GIC has trained five law school students to deliver the school program.



Staged reading of the short play “Big Brother,” which is about a female journalist who faced criminal defamation case because of her article disclosing human trafficking.

GIC has a project on “Theater for Human Rights” and produces readings of short human rights plays. Readers Theater, sometimes called staged readings, is quite simply the reading out loud of the script of a play for an audience. It is a “no-frill” production, but a production nonetheless. The readers are actors. The main difference between Readers Theater and a fully-staged production is that there are no costumes or elaborate sets and lighting. The focus is on the script and acting.

GIC uses this form of theatrical show for advocacy and education purposes because there are less production aspects to deal with, staged reading allows the presentation of human rights issues closer to the hearts of audience. In 2012, it first developed the scripts for two short plays for use in the decriminalization of defamation campaign. These plays are based on real stories of two female journalists who faced criminal defamation cases when they published their articles disclosing corruption and human trafficking. Using the videos of the staged readings, GIC is now developing a training module on free expression for judges, police officers and prosecutors.

## Challenges and Opportunities

According to the Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), Mongolia has had a partly free press since 2002 and remains a country with notable problems of press freedom.<sup>7</sup>

There are many challenges to the development of free and independent media in Mongolia. The violations of freedom of expression discussed earlier are in themselves problematic, but even more seriously they are part of a more critical problem related to the general political and financial dependence of the media. The immense influence political and financial groups have on the media leaves little room for accurate and independent work. The media are saturated with so-called “business news” in the form of paid articles or paid programs. While political and financial influence is common the world over, it is a major cause of concern in Mongolia. Since politicians and corporations are media owners, the journalists themselves do their reporting for the companies or the politicians. This situation risks losing whatever credibility is left of the profession and prevents the journalists from making critical reports on these companies or politicians. Journalists lose credibility when they cannot report honestly, and readers, listeners and viewers do not know what to believe when there is no distinction between advertorials and independently-prepared reports.

Some media outlets do not accept “business news,” but they often have a hard time avoiding it since it is such a common practice among journalists. On the other hand, problems regarding the exercise of the labor rights of journalists and their working conditions also affect the quality of journalism.

An Assessment Report of the Media Development of Mongolia states:<sup>8</sup>

Under the previous political regime, journalists, following the Soviet model, were obliged to become members of the Trade Union of Cultural Workers. This monopolistic trade union system collapsed during Mongolia's shift to democracy. The new Constitution and the 1991 Law on Trade Union Rights gave Mongolian media professionals the rights to assembly and to form unions and, more generally, to freely protect their labour rights in line with international standards.

Several associations were created following this liberalization process, including the Mongolian Free and Democratic Journalists Association (MFDJA) [which] was actively engaged in the introduction of a new democratic media culture and in the promotion of media freedom, the Mongolian Newspaper Association, the Mongolian Free Newspaper Association,

the Daily Newspapers Association, the Local Newspapers Association, the Local Radio Association, the Mongolian Television Federation, the Academy of Television and Radio, the Association of News Websites, the Mongolian Website Association and the Association of the Parliamentary Reporters. However, issues of wages and social insurance as well as working conditions, safety and security are rarely discussed openly and collectively.

Given that no surveys had been conducted on journalists' labour rights and awareness of trade unions, the authors of this report conducted such a survey. The sample included 40 journalists (20 males and 20 females) from 32 media outlets: ten television channels, two radio stations, five websites, nine newspapers, five magazines and one news agency (MONTSAME). The results showed that most media employers establish labour contracts when they hire new journalists. Small media outlets rarely have contracts. In some small media organizations, journalists work for a year without a contract. Some progress has reportedly been made regarding the payment of employees' health insurance. The results from this study show that journalists lack awareness of trade unions and labour rights. The majority (73 percent) believe that in order to form a trade union, they need permission from their employers or representatives from the Mongolian Journalists Association. However, the Mongolian Journalists Association is an NGO that does not play the role of a trade union; and it is not legally entitled to negotiate salaries and labour rights with employers. It is also common understanding among journalists that by establishing a trade union, they fall under the strict scrutiny of their employers and jeopardize their job security. Some journalists (26 percent) thought their editors or directors would not welcome the idea of a trade union. Many journalists did not know the benefits of a trade union. Furthermore, the survey suggests that young journalists tend to avoid talking about trade unions due to a belief that it will harm their careers. On the other hand, more senior and experienced journalists expressed an interest in trade unions but were rarely active in promoting their importance. Out of the 40 participants surveyed, eight were editors or managers. Almost all of them (seven persons) answered that they would not be opposed to the active participation in trade unions of the journalists under their supervision. In 2011, the *Udriinshuudan* newspaper formed and registered its own trade union and started collecting membership fees of 5,000 MNT (approximately US\$ 2.5). After less than five years, the union's chairperson resigned and the union stopped operating.

In 2016, global media passed through a dark and difficult period with media accused of propagating and disseminating “fake news.” It made journalism the target of political propaganda, but this so-called “post-truth era” presented both challenges and new opportunities for journalism. It affected the public’s right to be well-informed and participate in the decision-making process on issues regarding democracy and changes in their lives. For the last year, media leaders, media policymakers and academia have been scratching their brains to find out what went wrong. Some blame the Russians, technology and Internet, while others wave an accusatory finger at social media giants such as Google, Facebook and Twitter. Others blame the media itself in those failures because the press is too politicized and broadcast systems are owned by the wealthy.

Media in Mongolia is totally abused and manipulated by the politicians. False news, fake news and disinformation are indeed both old and current problems of Mongolia. Interpreted as libel and insult by the political elite, debates have sharpened during discussions of the Criminal Law and Law on Administrative Offense in the Parliament. To the politicians, journalists are at fault for circulating “negative” information about them. Unfortunately, they seem to forget that many of them have their own media outlets.

However, GIC still believes that informed, knowledgeable and specialized journalists are those most able to bring about change. The pen is still mightier than the sword, and groups of well-trained and educated journalists will always have power in solidarity.

Training Forever!

## Endnotes

1 The Mongolian Media Landscape. Sector Analysis, full report available at [www.globeinter.org.mn/images/upld/Media%20secotor209x279.pdf](http://www.globeinter.org.mn/images/upld/Media%20secotor209x279.pdf), page 35.

2 The full UNESCO report is available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002453/245364e.pdf>.

3 UNESCO, Assessment of Media Development of Mongolia, 2016, page 91.

4 Ibid., page 89.

5 Access Info Europe (AIE) and the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), Global Right to Information Rating, [www.rti-rating.org/indicators-comparison/](http://www.rti-rating.org/indicators-comparison/).

6 Globe International Center, Media Freedom Report, 2015, [www.globeinter.org.mn/images/upld/Hevleliinerhcholoo2016eng.pdf](http://www.globeinter.org.mn/images/upld/Hevleliinerhcholoo2016eng.pdf).

7 For reports on Mongolia media, visit Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/mongolia>.

8 UNESCO, op. cit., page 95.