

Human Rights Training for Journalists in Bangladesh

Drik Picture Library

DRIK IS A PREMIER visual media communication organization that has steadfastly been with the people of Bangladesh for over two decades—teaching, informing, influencing and changing their lives. Established in 1989, Drik has been and is driven by a need to change the identity of Bangladesh as an icon of poverty, while challenging the western hegemony in photography. “The audacity of it wasn’t an issue. We knew the rules of physics could be bent,” says Shahidul Alam, Managing Director and founder, talking about the setting up of a world-class photo library in the hinterland of photography. It was not that he was not aware of the challenge – but Alam, a pugnacious critic and activist wanted change desperately – a change in how Bangladesh’s story was being told and controlled by the Western media, a change and opportunities for his marginalized people.

This core vision of his has been the singular motivating force for Drik. The goal still is to work towards making Bangladesh a country where people can exercise their right to express dissent peacefully, a country where information will flow freely and knowledge and skills needed for individuals to attain their full potential is available to them. This goal seems to be a gigantic task considering the long list of human rights issues that plague the country -- violence against women and girls, arbitrary arrests and detentions, excessive use of force, extrajudicial killings, torture, death penalty, impunity and lack of rights for indigenous peoples to name a few. But Drik has never been shy in taking on challenges and has stayed unbridled in its politics against all odds. Its programs and interventions have successfully informed and educated the public, making issues that were opaque more transparent.

Programs and Interventions

Drik was launched on 4 September 1989 as Drik Alokchitra Granthagar. The Sanskrit word Drik means vision, inner vision, and philosophy of vision. That vision of a more egalitarian world, where materially poor nations have a say in how they are represented, is what Drik aspires to in its work.

Programs and initiatives Drik has undertaken over the years have successfully drawn attention to many human rights issues that have impacted on the marginalized communities in Bangladesh, cause both by the callousness of the state and society, but also due to foreign intervention. When HIV/AIDS was a taboo subject Drik went on to portray sensitively the suffering, and the courage of many. Stories about sex workers, migrant labor, child marriages, homosexuality and a plethora of subjects that had either been unsaid, or presented through the eyes of the privileged has led to a more nuanced and sensitive understanding of subaltern lives.

Currently Drik is establishing a network of rural visual journalists who through their work will be able to bring multimedia stories from the districts on governance, human rights and other related issues to the attention of the world. Eleven journalists were trained in November 2011 and twenty more are undergoing training in March 2012. Their stories will be distributed by DrikNews (www.driknews.net) and the Banglarights (<http://www.banglarights.net>) websites. The goal is to extend and build a strong network of over sixty local journalists who will report directly from rural Bangladesh.

The Crossfire exhibition on extra-judicial killings held in 2010 drew worldwide attention to the extra-judicial killings carried out by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)—a sinister black-clad group formed seven years ago from members of Bangladesh Police, Army, Navy and Air Force. RAB was (and is still) carrying out extra-judicial killings and torture of people in custody. There was a drop in incidents soon after the exhibition but killings and disappearances continue with the numbers on the increase again. The powerful visual message of the Crossfire Exhibition will be used again in 2012 focusing on audience engagement both nationally in Bangladesh and an exhibition at Queens Museum, New York, U.S.A. The goal is to inform and strengthen grassroots communities and gather international support to end extra-judicial killings in Bangladesh.

From the early nineties, Drik Picture Library has been collecting, listing, and recording the scattered visual fragments of 1971 the year of liberation for Bangladesh, as well as oral records, documents and physical artifacts. Drik made several attempts to piece together the scattered history with an initial publication on Bangladesh's 25th anniversary in Drik's 1996 calendar, an exhibition in the first Chobi Mela in 2000, followed by the publication of a book and a film on refugees in 2011, titled "The birth pangs of a nation."

In February 2012, Drik initiated “Archiving 1971” a program to collect oral, textual and visual resources to establish a one stop repository of this historical event. The aim is to bring together a team of researchers, social scientists, historians, archivists and other professionals to assemble definitive archives of the country. The ten-year plan includes not only gathering the material from all over the world but also economic resources necessary to form permanent physical archives. This will enable academics, researchers and other interested people to conduct rigorous analysis and to draw inspiration from the repository.

In 1992, Drik partnered with Autograph in London to set up a collective of women photographers and ran a workshop with British photographer Poulomi Desai. Their photographic work “Seeing with another eye” (*Onno Chokhe Dekha*) explored issues of gender and representation and analyzed the position of women in Bangladeshi society. The resulting exhibition from this workshop, curated by Shahidul Alam, toured Bangladesh, U.K. and France. Several members of this collective have gone on to build successful media careers.

Long before social responsibility became a buzz word in the corporate sector, Drik was out there challenging social inequality. In a pioneering exercise titled “Out of Focus,” a group of children from working class families of Mirpur were trained in 1994 by Alam with pinhole and simple conventional cameras to take photographs and tell the story of Bangladesh as they saw it. They are no longer children. Several work in Drik, and most have worked internationally with Drik’s regional partners. They have held major international exhibitions, successful television and radio broadcasts, films that have been nominated for awards in international festivals and publications in mainstream media. Four of the Group were in the “Mukthok Khobar” Bangladesh’s first children’s news program on television. One won the first Emmy from Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh human rights website (<http://www.banglarights.net>) was set up in 2001. This was not viewed favorably by the government but Drik tenaciously held on to this independent platform for media professionals and activists. This initiative trained journalists, provided a web portal and built a bulwark of media professionals and human rights activists to champion principles to address social inequalities and domination at national and international levels.

The need for Bangladeshis, who value rights and freedoms, to work in concert within and across borders remains a vital issue as human rights abuses escalate. Even more so now, as those who challenge abuse of power are persecuted. The initial bulwark set up needs strengthening now to keep the spotlight on unresolved human rights issues. Educating and strengthening the skills of media makes them significant info-intermediaries that apprise people about their rights to challenge injustice. Drik sees this as a continuation of the banglarights.net journey and one that needs to be travelled, to lessen the pain and suffering of the majority of this world. However, the site became dormant due to lack of funds but is now being revived. The stories resulting from this human rights training are on this site and is under construction now.

The term Majority World entered the lexicon of Drik as Alam rejected the West's "Third World" label for the majority of humankind. Majority World defined the community in terms of what it has (the cultural, intellectual social wealth of the nations) rather than what it lacks.

The online image agency Majority World came into being in 2007. It is a unique online photo-library, whose mission is to support, develop and promote indigenous photographers from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The portal <http://www.majorityworld.com> gives 24/7 access to quality images and opportunities to commission work from leading photographers and agencies from these countries.

The Proposed Intervention

The proposed intervention to address this need to improve reporting on the human rights issue is a human rights training course for urban journalists in Bangladesh. Drik held this training course on 19 July to 11 August 2011 in Dhaka, Bangladesh in partnership with Internews (www.internews.org) an international non-profit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard.

The aim was to make this training a pilot program, and the course manual compiled to be used to replicate the training in other cities in Bangladesh.

Goal

The goal was to train and build a group of journalists with a sound understanding of the elements of human rights laws, reporting and other relevant skills to be able to raise awareness and draw attention of the public to human rights issues in the country.

Subsumed in this goal was the wish that the participants would be motivated to contribute regularly to the Banglarights (<http://banglarights.net/>) and Driknews (www.driknews.net) websites.

The specific objectives were to train participants to:

- investigate and report on human rights issues
- gain a sound understanding of the concept of human rights, the historical background and the legal basis of human rights
- be better able to appropriately identify and report on human rights issues in Bangladesh
- expand their personal and technical skills to investigate and cover human rights issues
- develop appropriate sensitivity to issues of “human concern” and how these might be handled in Bangladesh
- understand risks that they might be exposed to, and learn how to minimize risks
- acquire “subject specific” knowledge in chosen areas of human rights (e.g. women’s rights, children’s rights, garment worker’s rights etc).

The Course Structure

The course was envisaged as a participatory learning process using creative, interactive teaching methods, which offer the best hope for securing the active longtime involvement of the program participants. The course design included presentations and discussions by guest lecturers in addition to the trainers; round table discussions; working groups; case studies; problem-solving/brainstorming, simulation/role-playing, and practical exercises (including drafting).

Twenty journalists initially registered for the course but only sixteen followed the course to completion.

The sixteen participants (fifteen males and one female) represented several media sectors:

- Print media – nine participants
- Electronic media – three participants
- Legal aid non-governmental organizations (Odhikar and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust [BLAST]) – two participants
- Freelance photojournalist and Reporter – two participants.

The first part of the course from 19-21 July 2011 was instructional and used creative, interactive teaching methods, including presentations and discussion by guest lecturers, as well as open discussions with human rights defenders activists and victims.

During the second part of the program, the participants undertook an assignment on human rights under the supervision of trainers and mentors. The final part of the training was a review program on 8-9 August 2011 where the work produced by the participants during the assignment period was openly evaluated by the trainers, mentors and the participants themselves.

A well-attended awards ceremony was held on the 11 August 2011 with Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Bangladesh, as the chief guest and Mr. Nurul Kabir, editor of *New Age* Bangladesh newspaper, as the guest of honor.

One participant each from electronic, print and photography sections made presentations. See Annex A for the list of the training course outputs.

Course Content Outline

The content of the course is outlined below.

I. Day One

The first day had the following course content outline:

Introductory Session:

This session consisted of introduction of participants, resource persons and Drik staff; review of the participants' expectation; and the setting of rules of the whole training period.

The objective of this session was to create a friendly participatory learning environment, review expectations of the participants and give them an opportunity to design a set of rules for the training period.

Session 1: Understanding the Human Rights Concept and the Underlying Principles

This session covered the following subjects:

- History of human rights discourse
- International Bill of Rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR], International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR])
- Human rights and State responsibility
- Human rights violation vis-à-vis Crime.

Using the film ‘The Story of Human Rights,’ the following ideas were introduced and explained:

- 3R rights framework – **R**ights, **R**ecognition and **R**esponsibility
- main State responsibilities - **R**espect, to **P**rotect and to **F**ulfill citizens’ rights.
- the difference between a human rights violation and a crime.

Session 2: Role of Media in Social Justice

This session covered the following subjects:

- The role of the journalists
- The need for human rights journalism
- Scope of human rights journalism.

Brainstorming, lecture and discussion activities were held in this session.

Session 3: Journalists as Human Rights Defenders

This session covered the following subjects:

- Changing role of journalists in the new social media age
- Introduction to citizen journalism, blogs, stories behind stories, i-reporting, etc.
- Importance of a strong human rights network

- Opportunities for making a change, reaching out via the banglarights.net.

Lecture and discussion were held in this session.

Session 4: Practical Experience of a Human Rights Defender

In this session, participants heard about the experience of a social activist and a human rights defender and shared how the work transformed him as an activist or defender, and explained the risks he faced and his survival tools and skills.

The first day ended with a summary of the day's proceedings and evaluation.

II. Day Two

The second day had the following course content:

Introductory Session

The training session on the second day commenced with a recap of previous day's learning.

Session 5: Right to Information in the International Human Rights Framework

This session covered the following subjects:

- UDHR and ICCPR
- International treaties that guarantee freedom of information
- International principles and standards on right to information (RTI) law
- Global status of RTI laws
- Status of RTI laws in the member-countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
- Work and principles of United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Commonwealth, Article 19, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Amnesty International, etc.

Session 6: Right to Information Act and the Rules of 2009, Bangladesh

This session dealt with the salient features of the Right to Information Act.

Session 7: Understanding the Domestic Legal Framework with Reference to Journalism

This session covered the following subjects:

- Laws relating to contempt of court and defamation
- Legal remedies including protection of fundamental rights (Writ)

Bangladesh laws that hinder or help the work of the journalists were discussed, focusing on practical case studies on the strength and weaknesses of the legal protection mechanisms including the higher judiciary.

Session 8: Experience of a Survivor Encountering the Legal Framework

The second day ended with a summary of the day's proceedings and evaluation.

III. Day Three

The third day had the following course content:

Session 9: Human Rights Reporting

This session covered the following subjects:

- Elements and ethics of human rights reporting
- Necessary skills and methods for human rights reporting.

Session 10: Reporting from the Survivors Perspective

This session covered the following subjects:

- Understanding survivors plight
- Recognizing diversity, upholding plurality.

In this session, participants were taken through a practical exercise of transforming a crime report to a human rights report.

Session 11: Practical work: Preparing a Human Rights Report

The objective of this session was to give guidance to the participants to prepare for their print, audiovisual or photography assignment with a narrative portion of five hundred to six hundred words. This session also gave the participants an opportunity to review their existing work in the light of what they had learned about human rights reporting.

The third and last day ended with a summary of the day's proceedings and evaluation.

See Annex B for the details of the course program.

Assessment of strengths /weaknesses

The lead trainer's and Mentor's/advisor's assessment of the trainees based on their participation and work produced:

- The group was very enthusiastic and had a positive energy. All the participants were keen on learning and attended sessions regularly. Most were punctual; actively participated by asking questions to clarify issues and worked keenly on their assignments.
- All the trainers used powerpoint slides and the participants sometimes got tired of this. They were hungry for more practical real life examples. However, the course had incorporated several who spoke from their practical experience and illustrated points with real life examples.
- Handouts were popular as many found them useful.
- Although heads of departments of the news agencies had agreed to release journalists for this course there were times when this promise was broken. However, many or all stayed till the sessions ended at 5 p.m.
- Grasp of theoretical knowledge was good but some weaknesses were highlighted in the following feedback received from the mentors for the practical work.
- Except for one photographer, no one supplied meta data (This is information that needs to be inserted into a digital photo file that will identify who owns it, copyright and contact information, what camera created the file, along with exposure information and descriptive information such as keywords about the photo)
- No one sequenced the photographs into an order that would present the story in the best light
- Very few used personal quotes
- No one followed 5Ws and H for captions
- No one provided proper titles for their photographs
- No one provided references to source
- Music at the beginning in the video and end was not acceptable
- Script of video was weak.

Overall Course Evaluation

The training course met the aim of training and building a group of urban journalists with a sound understanding of the elements of human rights laws enabling them to effectively and accurately draw attention to human rights issues.

The successful completion of the training of journalists also contributed significantly to Drik's core vision of working toward making Bangladesh a country where people can exercise their right to express dissent peacefully, a country where information will flow freely and knowledge and skills needed for individuals to attain their full potential is made available to them.

The training course included pre- and post-training evaluative exercises. At pre-training level, all participants submitted a portfolio of written articles on human rights issues/photo stories, video documentaries, and responded to a questionnaire. This enabled the trainers to gauge the knowledge and skills of the participants and to tailor his/her course to their particular educational needs.

Post-course questionnaires/articles and evaluation sessions allowed trainees to gauge what they have learned. Feedback from participants will be used to modify and improve the courses and materials for subsequent training.

The course needs to be replicated for training in human rights reporting for the photojournalists of the Regional Network of Visual Journalism (RVNJ) of Drik.

Recommendations for future direction/course content

Based on the experience of conducting this course Drik's recommendations are to:

- Hold the course at a location away from city, making it residential to enable participants to concentrate on the work and assignments better.
- Try to get more female participants.
- Include sessions on writing and building report writing skills, and caption writing skills.

Concluding Note

It is ironic that political parties the world over have universally abandoned their support for social justice, while continuing to flag it in their rhetoric. The disregard for human rights is damaging in all societies, but it is specifically peoples who are vulnerable who suffer the most.

Drik has been campaigning for the rights of the disenfranchised since 1989. As such it has a long-standing reputation and track record in standing up for the oppressed. It was this credibility of Drik, which made this workshop possible.

Drik is in a unique position where it is not affiliated to any political, corporate, media or donor organization. Nor is it perceived as a threat by human rights non-governmental organizations, which often get involved in turf wars. This provided the acceptability of this workshop where participants from 'competing' human rights organizations and media houses, not only responded to Drik's call, but worked together in collaborative teams to report on human rights issues, which they had never before done.

Drik's skills as a communication organization and its in-house production expertise also came to the fore, as the rapid turnaround and dissemination of media products simulated real life situations that journalists and activists might face though they are often prevented from reporting on them because of the commercial and political pressures that media houses operate under. As such this became a testing ground for many frustrated journalists and activists who eventually found an outlet for stories they felt needed to be told. Because of its wider network and its international presence, Drik was also able to place the Bangladeshi situation in a broader geopolitical setting, and was able to work with the participants in developing strategies at both national and international levels to deal with human rights reporting.

However, one must be careful not to create expectations that cannot be met. It is important, now that both the Banglarights.net website has been re-activated, and committed journalists and human rights activists have

been given the tools with which they can address social inequality, that follow up programs are put in place so that the stories that are unearthed can be widely disseminated and can result in lasting reform. These are issues that the organizers, Internews and Drik, both need to take on. It is only then that the workshop will have been meaningful.

Annex A

Training Course Outputs

Video:

- Video of the Human Rights Training

Press Release:

- Journalists Strengthen Skills to Uphold Human Rights in Bangladesh
- Stories produced in English (<http://banglarights.net>)
- Lower income groups cry for safe drinking water - Rafiqul Islam
- Constitutionality of mobile courts during *hartal* (strike) - Md. Raisul Islam Sourav
- Report on 'Human Rights Violation in police custody' - Custodial torture - Mohammad Ali
- Bangladesh Transport skids on workers' rights - Musfequr Rahman
- Construction Workers - Rakib Ahmed
- Violation of health rights: needs progressive realization right now - Prito Reza
- A Deadly Game - Monirul Alam
- Human Trafficking: A Modern Slavery - Khairul Kuader
- Felani is not the end... - A M Ahad

The Training Manual.

Annex B

Course Content Outline

Day 1

- Registration of participants
- Opening and Introduction
- Welcome and clarifying objectives - Shahidul Alam, Drik
- Video Conference with Omar Barghouti
- Keynote address by the Special Guest- Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman NHRC

“With Bangladesh gaining geopolitical importance, many forces are at play and human rights violations have dramatically escalated with perpetrators operating with impunity. Trained journalists will play a vital role in challenging the abuse of power,” said Shahidul Alam, Managing Director of Drik at the commencement of the course.

Omar Barghouti, a Palestinian researcher, commentator and human rights activist speaking online at the opening session shared his experience, focusing on the special role accurate, fair and professional reporting and analysis plays as a catalyst in upholding human rights and supporting the peaceful resistance to human rights abuses, as in the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement (see www.BDSmovement.net for more information).

- Introductory Session: Ice breaking and getting acquainted (60 min.)
- Introductions –participants, resource persons and Drik staff
- Review of participants’ expectations
- Setting rules

Facilitator: Lead trainer Sanaiyya Faheem Ansari

Objective: To create a friendly participatory learning environment, review expectations of the participants and give them an opportunity to design a set of rules for the training period.

Description: Games, storytelling, small group discussion and brainstorming.

Session 1: Facilitator: Sayeed Ahmad, Expert-NHRC/UNDP

Subjects covered:

- Understanding the Human Rights Concept and the Underlying Principles (60 minutes)

- History of Human Rights Discourse
- International Bill of Rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR], International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural and Rights [ICESCR])
- Human Rights and State Responsibility
- Human Rights Violation vis-à-vis Crime

Method : A film 'The story of Human Rights' shown.

The facilitator introduced and explained:

- 3R rights framework – Rights, Recognition and Responsibility (20 min.)
- Main State responsibilities - Respect, to Protect and to Fulfill citizens' rights.
- The difference between a human rights violation and a crime (15 min).

Session summing up by the facilitator. (5 min.)

Session 2: Facilitators — Lead trainer and Shahidul Alam

Role of Media in Social Justice (45 min.)

Subjects covered:

- The role of the journalists
- The need for human rights journalism
- Scope of human rights journalism

Method: Brainstorming, lecture and discussion.

Session 3: Facilitator: Shahidul Alam

Journalists as Human Rights Defenders (90 min.)

Subjects covered:

- Changing role of journalists in the new social media age.
- Introduction to citizen journalism, blogs, stories behind stories, i-reporting etc.
- Importance of a strong human rights network.
- Opportunities for making a change, reaching out via the banglarights.net.

Banglarights is an independent web portal, which exposes and challenges discriminations and violations of human rights. This portal (banglarights.net) upholds human rights reforms both in Bangladesh and in the international arena, in support of

women, children, and marginalized communities resisting various forms of oppression. (45 min.). The facilitator discussed with the participants opportunities available to journalists through the banglarights website.

Method: Lecture and discussion

Session 4 Shawkat Milton, Senior Reporter: The Asian Television Network (ATN) Bangla

Subject covered:

- Practical Experience of a Human Rights Defender (45 min.)

In this session, participants heard about the experience of a social activist and a human rights defender and shared how the work transformed him as an activist or defender, and explained the risks he faced and his survival tools and skills.

Closing Session of the Day (30 min.)

Summary of the day and wrap up

Daily evaluation (15 min.)

Day 2

Introductory Session: Recap of previous day's learning (30 min.)

Session 5: Trainer: Rubaiyat Mollika, Consultant, Article 19 Bangladesh

Right to Information in the International Human Rights Framework (60 min.)

Subjects covered:

The UDHR and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); international treaties that guarantee freedom of information; International Principles and Standards on RTI law; World status of RTI laws; status of RTI laws in the member-countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC); the work and principles of United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), Commonwealth, Article 19, CPJ, Amnesty International etc.

Session 6: Facilitator: Lead trainer

Right to Information Act and the Rules of 2009, Bangladesh (90min.)

Guest speaker: Sanjida Sobhan, Program Coordinator, Manusher Jonno (For the people) Foundation.

Subject covered:
Salient features of the FOI Act.

Session 7: Trainer: Barrister Sara Hossain

Understanding the domestic legal framework with reference to journalism (90 min.)

Subjects covered:

- Laws relating to contempt of court and defamation
- Legal remedies including protection of fundamental rights (Writ)
- Bangladesh laws that hinder or help the work of the journalists were discussed, focusing on practical case studies on the strength and weaknesses of the legal protection mechanisms including the higher judiciary.

Session 8 Guest speaker -- Taslima Akhtar, Activist and Photographer

Subject covered:
Experience of a survivor countering the legal framework (45 min.)

Closing Session (30 min.)

Summary for the day, and wrap up
Oral Evaluation

Day 3

Recap of previous day's learning (30 min.)

Session 9

Human Rights Reporting (90 min.): Facilitator: Lead trainer

Subjects covered:

- Elements and Ethics of Human Rights Reporting
- Necessary Skills and Methods for Human Rights Reporting

Guest speakers:

Hana Shams Ahmed, Coordinator, International Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission
Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Editor-in-chief and CEO, Boishakhi Television

Session 10

Reporting from the Survivor's Perspective (60 min.): Facilitator --Lead trainer

Subjects covered:

- Understanding survivors plight
- Recognizing diversity, upholding plurality

Guest speaker

Shafiq Alam, Deputy Bureau Chief, AFP Dhaka

In this session, participants were taken through a practical exercise of transforming a crime report to a human rights report.

Session 11

Practical work: Preparing a Human Rights Report (60 min.)

Three Mentors (print, electronic and photojournalism) will guide them.

Mentors:

- Salim Khan, News Chief, Mohona TV
- Shahidul Alam, Principal of Pathshala South Asian Media Academy
- Reaz Ahmad, News Editor, *The Daily Star*
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Objective:

The objective of this session was to give guidance to the participants to prepare for their print, audiovisual or photography assignment with a narrative portion of five hundred to six hundred words. This session also gave the participants an opportunity to review their existing work in the light of what they have learned about human rights reporting.

Closing Session of the Day (30 min.)

Summary of the day, wrap up and evaluation.