

2023

Success Stories

Inspiring the Next Generation of
Independent Media in Pakistan
Search for Common Ground



Developed and Designed @ <https://maher.consuting>



Table of Contents

- ii** Acknowledgement
- iii** About Search for Common Ground
- iv** Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan-An Introduction
- 01** Empowering Ethical Journalism: Ejaz Ali's Journey of Passion and Responsibility
- 03** Fakhar ul Islam Turned out to be a Women's Rights Champion in Hangu District
- 05** After the completion of the Training Program, Farooq is effectively Reporting on Sensitive Topics
- 07** Breaking Barriers: Laraib's Path to Gender-Inclusive Journalism and Environmental Advocacy of the Year
- 09** Unveiling Hidden Stories: Mahnoor's Quest for Independent Journalism in South Waziristan
- 11** Transforming Journalism: Manzoor is Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan
- 13** Mehrab: A Young Journalist Who Dreamed of an Independent and Gender-Balance Media in Landi Kotal
- 15** Seema Wazir: Empowering Journalism in a Male-Dominated Society
- 17** Unleashing Potential: Shah Faisal's Commitment to Amplify Voices Through Journalism
- 19** Sidra's Path to Empowerment: Championing Women in Journalism



Acknowledgement

As we reach the culmination of the project "Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan", I am elated to present these success stories that showcase the profound impact of the project. At MAHER Consulting, our role was to capture and present the inspiring journeys of these young journalists who have emerged as powerful advocates for conflict-sensitive journalism and marginalized voices.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the individuals and organizations that made this project possible. Firstly, I express my gratitude to Mr. Shahid Rahim from SFCG Pakistan office for facilitating the connection between MAHER Consulting and the regional teams in Kyrgyzstan, and the local implementing partners. His support has been instrumental in the creation of these success stories.

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I extend my sincere appreciation to the journalists from Dera Ismael Khan, Peshawar, Quetta who willingly shared their experiences and insights during the interviews. Their valuable contributions have enriched the authenticity and impact of these stories.

Lastly, I would like to extend my thanks to my team at MAHER Consulting for their dedicated efforts in crafting these success stories. Their commitment to excellence and attention to detail have been invaluable in presenting these narratives. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Muhammad Abdullah from MAHER Consulting for his valuable advice on photo selection and his technical expertise in ensuring the photo's compliance with our software requirements. I am also grateful to Ms. Shumaila Anjum for her invaluable support in Urdu translation and typing all Urdu stories. Ms. Esha Amer's contribution in developing the initial drafts of some stories has been instrumental in shaping the narratives for further refinement.

I am humbled and inspired by the dedication and passion of the young journalists featured in these stories. Their unwavering commitment to responsible and impactful journalism is a testament to the success of this project. I hope that these stories will serve as a source of inspiration for others and contribute to a more inclusive and informed media landscape in Pakistan.

Sincerely,

Amer Ejaz

CEO, MAHER Consulting

<https://maher.consulting>; maher@maher.consulting



Introduction

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND is the largest dedicated peacebuilding organization. Since 1982, we have worked to end violent conflict and to build healthy, safe, and just societies all over the world. Currently, we work in 31 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America.



MISSION

Our mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions.



Our Belief

WE BELIEVE that conflict is inevitable but violence is not. Conflict is a natural result of human diversity. When we deal with conflict adversarially, it generates polarization and violence. When we collaborate, conflict catalyzes positive change.



Vision

our vision is of a world where:
Differences stimulate social progress, rather than precipitate violence.
Respect for and cooperation with those we disagree with is considered the norm for individuals, communities, organizations, and nations.

Search for Common Ground



Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan-An Introduction



Search for Common Ground (Search) launched the “Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan” project in September 2020. This project, implemented in collaboration with the Media Resource & Training Center (MTRC), Freedom Network (FN), and the Media Center (MC), aimed to support the growth of independent and diverse media in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), by increasing the capacity of young journalists, particularly young women, in independent and conflict-sensitive reporting; and fostering an enabling environment for the professional advancement of women in media.

Working with local universities and press clubs, the project focused on building sustainable initiatives that can be institutionalized in these bodies to support the next generation of independent journalists.

Theory of Change: IF young journalists are equipped to champion conflict-sensitive journalism in independent media, AND the media sector is more supportive of women's participation, THEN independent media in KP and Balochistan will be better able to represent more diverse perspectives and narratives while using conflict-sensitive approaches to better navigate challenges and risks in the sector.

The overall goal of the project was to advance women- and youth-led independent media in KP and Balochistan. This goal was supported by the following objectives and corresponding expected results:

Objective 1: Promote the practice of conflict-sensitive journalism by young journalists and university media departments in KP and Balochistan.

- 1.1: Targeted local universities institutionalize conflict-sensitive journalism in their media department curricula.
- 1.2: Young journalists in the target districts have increased access to resources and capacity building to champion conflict-sensitive journalism in their work.

Objective 2: Foster an enabling environment for the professional advancement of women in independent media in KP and Balochistan.

- 2.1: Targeted local independent media actors better support women in media.
- 2.2: Independent women journalists in the target districts feel more confident and safer in their workplaces.

Activities

Activities contributing to Objective 2:

- 1.1.1 Consultative Workshops with Universities
- 1.1.2 Training of Trainers on Conflict-Sensitive Journalism
- 1.1.3 Journalist Training Program
- 1.2.1 Media Mentorships
- 1.2.2 Media Fellowships

Activities contributing to Objective 2:

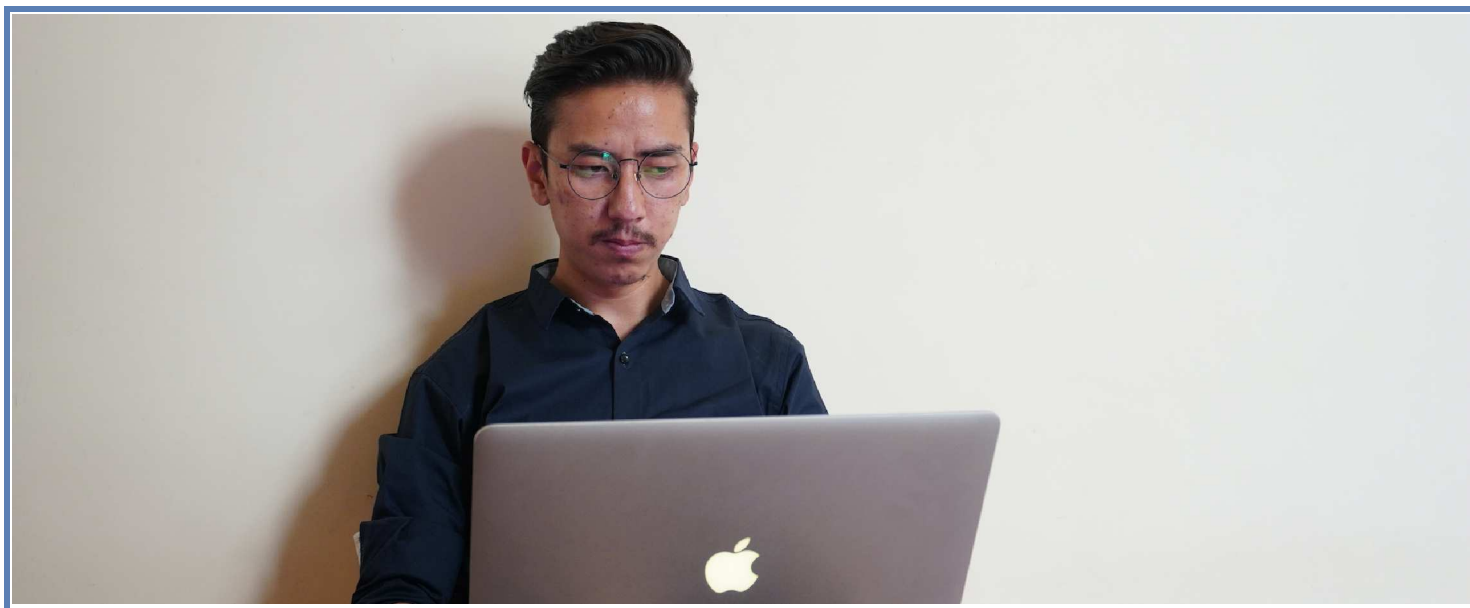
- 2.1.1 Gender Training for Press Clubs
- 2.1.2 Workshops with Media Houses
- 2.2.1 Press Club Reform Initiatives
- 2.2.2 Expanding Networks for Women in Media

Empowering Ethical Journalism: Ejaz Ali's Journey of Passion and Responsibility

"I ensure my safety and reporting accuracy go hand in hand. That's why I now strictly adhere to all security protocols while covering stories in challenging environments."

— Ejaz Ali, Quetta —

"As journalists, we have a profound responsibility to bring forth authentic narratives and amplify the voices of the marginalized using our platforms. It will foster understanding, empathy, and positive change." Fueled by the pursuit of responsible journalism, Ejaz Ali believes true power lies in reporting the truth with utmost integrity and compassion.



Ejaz Ali hails from the oppressed Hazara community of Balochistan. Through the training program offered by the project "Inspiring the Next Generation of Media in Pakistan," Ejaz discovered the power of ethical reporting, particularly in conflict-ridden areas. With his newfound skills and knowledge, Ejaz aspires to make a positive impact through documentaries and his website, by prioritizing responsible journalism and the representation of marginalized voices.

Ejaz's background as a member of the Hazara community and his encounters with oppression gave him a distinct perspective on the power of journalism. He had previously participated in a couple of workshops for journalists. Still, this training program was unique because it directly addressed the practical needs of Ejaz as a journalist. It equipped him with practical skills and a deeper understanding of journalism's role in promoting peace.

Another need that the training program addressed was fundamental knowledge of videography and photography, including lightning and angles during photography. For Ejaz, it was vital because it touched his passion for documentaries, which he has planned to master in the next few years of his career. The digital media training proved particularly relevant for Ejaz, establishing a solid foundation for his future expertise in documentaries.

But the most profound impact of the training was Ejaz's heightened sense of journalistic ethics and responsibility. Through training modules "Peace and Journalism" and "Conflict-sensitive Journalism," he realized the detrimental effects of reporting fake news and the importance of verifying information from multiple sources. Inspired by his newfound values, Ejaz took a bold step right after the training and launched his website, pakistanprime.pk. Through this platform, he aims to provide authentic and responsible journalism, focusing on peacebuilding and pacifying regional conflict situations.

Ejaz's journey in the training program also emphasized the significance of responsibly representing the voices of women and other weaker sections. He recognized that "by portraying them (marginalized groups) in a positive light, their stature in society would be elevated." Additionally, the training shed light on the crucial aspect of physical safety for journalists. Ejaz realized the need to implement safety protocols and practices to protect journalists in conflict-stricken areas, preventing unnecessary loss of life and ensuring the continuity of responsible journalism. "I ensure my safety and reporting accuracy go hand in hand. That's why I now strictly adhere to all security protocols while covering stories in challenging environments."

Looking toward the future, Ejaz Ali envisions a remarkable journey of growth and impact in the next five years. Fueled by his passion for responsible journalism, he plans to expand his documentary work, shedding light on pressing social issues and giving a voice to those who have long been silenced. Ejaz aims to collaborate with renowned filmmakers and organizations to create compelling visual narratives that challenge stereotypes and inspire societal transformation. With his website, pakistanprime.pk, he intends to build a strong online community, fostering meaningful conversations and promoting peace-building initiatives. Through his unwavering dedication to ethical reporting, Ejaz Ali envisions a future where journalism catalyzes positive change, shaping a more inclusive and informed society.



Fakhar ul Islam Turned out to be a Women's Rights Champion in Hangu District

"The training program has transformed my approach, equipping me with the necessary skills to delve deeper, gather reliable information, and present a well-researched story. I am now committed to ensuring the accuracy and credibility of my work, understanding the impact it can have on the communities I serve."

— Fakhar ul Islam, Hangu —

Fakhar is a young journalist from the conflict-ridden Hangu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). He had participated in several journalist training programs in the past. Most of these programs were on the personal safety of the journalists while reporting in a conflict area. However, it was the first time that a comprehensive capacity-building program was offered under the project "Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan." The program aimed to provide young journalists in the target districts with increased access to resources and capacity building to champion conflict-sensitive journalism in their work.



The ten-day training program offered five modules. These include conflict-sensitive journalism, journalism for peace, gender and journalism, digital journalism, and the safety and security of journalists. "This intensive program equipped him with the skills and knowledge necessary for responsible reporting in conflict-affected areas."

The training on conflict-sensitive journalism was particularly impactful for Fakhar. He learned to report in a well-researched, factual, and non-biased manner without exacerbating conflicts further. With this newfound understanding, Fakhar started covering stories with a conflict-sensitive approach. He conducted in-depth interviews, provided balanced perspectives, and highlighted the human side of conflicts. As a result, his stories began contributing to a better understanding of the underlying issues and promoting peace in his community.

The training program also sensitized him to the importance of reporting on gender issues. It led to a transformation in his mindset regarding women's rights. Previously, Fakhar did not support women's property rights, but after the training, he not only became convinced of their significance but also began advocating for them in the media. In addition, he actively addressed the issue of the non-representation of women in the Jirga system, a sensitive topic in his district. Through his stories, Fakhar gradually built a compelling argument for bringing the Newly Merged Districts into the ambit of the state's law, promoting fairness and justice.

The digital journalism module enhanced Fakhar's skills in navigating the rapidly evolving media landscape. For example, he learned to detect fake news and propaganda, ensuring his reporting remained credible and reliable. Fakhar also gained insights into effective social media strategies and website management, enabling him to stay competitive in the digital age. "I don't want to be left behind in this competitive age of digital media. This training enabled me to learn all the necessary skills and use them with confidence."

In addition to skills training, Fakhar also benefited from a one-month mentorship program. A leading journalist experienced in conflict-sensitive reporting provided guidance and support during this period. The mentorship helped Fakhar refine his storytelling skills, learn how to pitch ideas, and develop a deeper understanding of minority rights. As a result, Fakhar successfully pitched a story on minority rights and interfaith harmony with the help of the starter kit he received after completing the training workshop.

The training program's impact on Fakhar's success as a journalist is evident in his published stories. Through his conflict-sensitive reporting, Fakhar shed light on the realities faced by his community in Hangu. He highlighted the voices of marginalized groups, addressed sensitive topics such as women's rights and the Jirga system, and advocated for positive change. Fakhar's stories not only informed and educated the public but also promoted peace, understanding and social progress in his district.

The project provided Fakhar with the necessary resources and capacity building to become a champion of conflict-sensitive journalism in his district. Through the enhanced skills and newfound perspectives, these Fakhar has impacted his community, contributing to a more inclusive, informed, and peaceful society.

"The training program has transformed my approach, equipping me with the necessary skills to delve deeper, gather reliable information, and present a well-researched story. I am now committed to ensuring the accuracy and credibility of my work, understanding the impact it can have on the communities I serve."



After the successful completion of the Training Program, Farooq is effectively Reporting on Sensitive Topics

The training bridged the divide between theory and practice, equipping me with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of the media landscape and make a meaningful impact through my work."

—Muhammad Farooq, South Waziristan —

Hailing from the rugged terrains of South Waziristan, Farooq joined the training program that enriched his journalistic skills and instilled a deep sense of cultural sensitivity in his reporting. Through the training program offered by "Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media," Farooq discovered a missing link in his education and professional development.

Farooq recognized that his previous media education had overlooked crucial aspects of journalism, particularly the importance of practical knowledge and cultural sensitivity. The training program filled this critical gap, offering him a unique opportunity to acquire skills and insights directly relevant to his community and its complex dynamics.



Farooq delved into peace journalism and journalism in conflict-ridden areas during the training. These modules were very relevant to the geography where he works. He learned to navigate the delicate balance between reporting on sensitive issues while ensuring the safety of himself and those involved. The program equipped him with the necessary strategies and techniques to develop stories that shed light on the realities of conflict while promoting understanding, tolerance, and peace. "I still remember all the tips that were shared during the training and I applied them fully during my recent reporting of terrorist attacks in Waziristan and Tank."

The gender module of the training proved to be a turning point for Farooq's reporting. "I gained insights into presenting women's perspectives while honoring the cultural sensitivities of the community." Farooq had previously found himself in trouble while reporting a girls' school story, but the training equipped him with the skills to navigate such situations effectively. With newfound knowledge, he devised a strategy to raise awareness about the importance of including women's voices in reporting, fostering understanding and acceptance among the local community.

Building upon his training, Farooq has taken the lead by running an awareness campaign that subtly integrates gender and journalism. Through his storytelling, he sheds light on the challenges women journalists face in areas with limited internet access. By highlighting this issue, he aims to foster understanding and advocate for improved opportunities for women in journalism. Farooq's approach demonstrates his commitment to promoting inclusivity and addressing gender disparities in his reporting.

"One of the most impactful aspects of the training program was the presence of trainers who hailed from our own areas, sharing real-life examples from their experiences." This personal connection heightened the relevance and authenticity of the training, making it resonate deeply with Farooq and his fellow participants. The trainers' firsthand accounts served as powerful motivators, inspiring Farooq to embrace his role as a journalist with a renewed sense of purpose.

Looking toward the future, Farooq's ambition and newfound skills extend beyond traditional journalism. The training program also equipped him with essential digital skills, igniting his desire to vlog and establish his web channel. Farooq envisions a platform where he can freely express himself, providing an avenue for untethered storytelling and sharing diverse perspectives. Farooq's story is in line with the project's aim of equipping and empowering young journalists to better report on sensitive issues.

"One problem with media and communication education in Pakistan is the disproportionate emphasis on theory, often neglecting the importance of practical knowledge. The training provided by SFCG effectively filled this critical gap. Through their program, I gained hands-on experience, practical skills, and real-world insights that have been invaluable in my journalism career. The training bridged the divide between theory and practice, equipping me with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of the media landscape and make a meaningful impact through my work."



Breaking Barriers: Laraib's Path to Gender-Inclusive Journalism and Environmental Advocacy

“The training program proved highly beneficial as it equipped me with a comprehensive toolkit for video production. It opened a whole new world of possibilities in videography and sparked my interest in pursuing a career in documentary-making.

—Laraib Athar, Peshawar —

Laraib, a fresh graduate of media studies and an aspiring journalist, embarked on an empowering path of learning and growth through her participation in the mentorship and fellowship program under the project "Inspiring Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan." Alongside her attachment to a reputable media house, she also does freelance work, showcasing her versatility and commitment to strengthening her skills in the dynamic media landscape.

After completing the mentorship and fellowship program under the project, Laraib's perspective on journalism took a profound shift. Motivated by the program's emphasis on gender inclusion, she dedicated her career to highlighting the issues of weaker sections.



While tackling the gender inclusivity challenge, she courageously took up the cause of addressing the gender gap in voter registration, a prevalent issue in the patriarchal society of Shangla, where women are often denied the opportunity to cast their votes. Drawing on her digital media training, Laraib created a compelling piece that exposed women's hurdles in voter registration. Her work aimed to raise awareness and advocate for gender equality in the democratic process. Moreover, she delved into the pervasive problem of women harassment at the workplace, particularly in the health and education departments of KP, shedding light on the challenges female employees face in these sectors.

Passionate about advocating for minority rights, Laraib highlighted the pressing issue of the scarcity of burial places for the Christian community in KP. Through her compelling storytelling, she shed light on the struggles faced by the community in finding suitable burial grounds. The impact of her story was immediate, as it prompted the local administration to take action and commit to resolving the issue, ensuring that the Christian community would have dignified and accessible burial places.

Pushed by her newfound passion for gender-responsive journalism and environmental justice, Laraib excavated the pressing issue of decreasing honey production in her region. Through her investigative report, she highlighted the detrimental impact of urban development and the encroachment of housing colonies and markets on bees' natural habitats. Laraib's story not only raised awareness about the environmental consequences but also brought attention to the gendered aspects of honey production, showcasing the integral role of women in beekeeping and the need to empower them in sustainable practices.

While highlighting the issues of the marginalized, Laraib wrote about the struggles a vulnerable community involved in jaggery production faced. The farmers, frustrated with the processes of dealing with sugar mills, are now selling their sugarcane to jaggery producers instead. While highlighting the child labor issue, Laraib noted that Pakistan faces the daunting challenge of meeting the SDG target 8.7 by ending all forms of child labor by 2025. Unfortunately, the number of child laborers in KP is escalating alarmingly.

“The training program proved highly beneficial as it equipped me with a comprehensive toolkit for video production. It opened a whole new world of possibilities in videography and sparked my interest in pursuing a career in documentary-making. Moreover, the mentorship and fellowship program provided me with invaluable opportunities to interact with some of the industry's finest journalists, further enhancing their skills and knowledge.”

The impact of the training program is also evident in the changing attitudes and behaviors of media houses. There has been a noticeable shift as media houses are now more open to accepting and welcoming female journalists into their offices. During the project activities and interactions with various media houses, Laraib and two other females secured positions in the Peshawar office of a media house that had previously not employed female journalists.

In the next five years, Laraib envisions herself as a prominent advocate for gender inclusion, marginalized rights, and climate change in media. She aims to continue raising awareness through her impactful storytelling and documentary work. Laraib's journey aligns with the project objectives of local independent media actors to better support women in media and independent women journalists in the target districts to feel more confident and safer in their workplaces.



Unveiling Hidden Stories: Mahnoor's Quest for Independent Journalism in South Waziristan

The most important skill I learned from the training was smart camera work. It made me a self-sufficient journalist who can take interviews, report stories, and do camera work

—Mahnoor Malik, South Waziristan —

Mahnoor, a determined journalist from South Waziristan, embarked on a transformative journey in her career through the Project "Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan." Her story is a testament to the project's success in nurturing talented journalists and empowering them to create impactful change in their communities.

Mahnoor's journalistic career began in 2017 when she graduated from the Mass Communication department at a local university. However, it was her participation in the training program under the project that truly shaped her into the passionate and skilled journalist she is today. Reflecting on the trainers, she expressed her gratitude, saying, "Our trainers were very competent, and their knowledge was very updated. We thank SFCG for providing us a chance to interact with such a good lot."



Before the training, Mahnoor admitted that she and her colleagues were leaning towards yellow journalism, lacking adherence to ethical practices and standards. However, the training program revolutionized their perspective on journalism. Mahnoor exclaimed, "This training changed our view towards journalism, and I and many of my colleagues emerged as changed journalists from the training." They learned the importance of presenting balanced stories by considering multiple perspectives. She added, "Now we present a balanced story."

Overcoming cultural barriers and objections, Mahnoor persistently pursued her stories. In a society where observing "pardah" (veil) is strictly followed, she faced resistance in capturing visuals. Undeterred, she adapted her approach, transforming her video story on widows into a written piece. Similarly, elders' objections led her to remove her voiceover from a video story on the victims of a bomb blast and the plight of their victims. However, she remained undaunted, ensuring her story reached the public through print media.

As a woman journalist in South Waziristan, Mahnoor faced frustrating limitations. “While women are excelling in education, they are often restricted to ‘soft beats’ like health and education, facing barriers in ‘hard beats’ like politics and peace.” Mahnoor voiced her frustration for the change in cultural norms and providing opportunities for female journalists to report on a wide range of topics.

The training program also equipped Mahnoor with essential skills, particularly in smart camera work. She shared, “The most important skill I learned from the training was smart camera work. It made me a self-sufficient journalist who can take interviews, report stories, and do camera work.” Additionally, she gained valuable knowledge on safety measures in conflict zones, ensuring her well-being while reporting.

Mahnoor emphasized investing in journalists in less developed areas like South Waziristan. She said that without strong capacity and support, their stories may not receive national media coverage. By building the capacity of local journalists and empowering them, their voices can effectively convey the challenges and aspirations of their communities.

Mahnoor's journey exemplifies the project's objective of inspiring independent journalism and empowering journalists to create positive change. With her determination, passion for truth, and commitment to reporting untold stories, Mahnoor is breaking barriers and overcoming hurdles. Her dedication to promoting inclusive and unbiased journalism sets a precedent for aspiring journalists to follow in her footsteps and work toward a more informed and equitable society.



Transforming Journalism: Manzoor is Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan

"Before the training, I used to take the news at face value without bothering to verify the facts. But now, I understand the importance of rigorous fact-checking and ensuring the accuracy of the news I report. The training has instilled a sense of responsibility and integrity as a journalist."

—Manzoor Ahmad, Quetta —

Manzoor is an experienced journalist and esteemed member of the Quetta Press Club. He was nominated by the press club as a master trainer for the "Inspiring Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan" project. He got training as a master trainer and then delivered comprehensive training sessions at the Quetta Hub. He also served as a mentor to the aspiring journalists who underwent the training program. However, little did Manzoor realize that this training would not only benefit those he trained but also profoundly transform his approach to journalism. The program provided invaluable insights, equipping him with new skills and techniques he had previously overlooked but wholeheartedly embraced post-training.



In his training, Manzoor learned the importance of skepticism and thorough fact-checking in journalism. He realized that journalists must question everything they encounter and refuse to believe anything until it has undergone rigorous verification. This helped him understand the grey areas of journalism better. "Before the training, I used to take the news at face value without bothering to verify the facts. But now, I understand the importance of rigorous fact-checking and ensuring the accuracy of the news I report. The training has instilled a sense of responsibility and integrity as a journalist."

One crucial lesson Manzoor learned was the significance of consent, especially regarding women, before publishing news. He recognized the importance of asking critical questions before disseminating any media that could affect those captured. This includes ensuring their safety, giving content creators proper credit, and, most importantly, respecting their wishes.

The concept of peace journalism also left a profound impact on Manzoor. Understanding the role of journalism in promoting peace and reconciliation, he learned effective strategies to bring rival factions closer and prevent the escalation of conflicts. He enthusiastically shared this knowledge with the trainees he mentored, fostering a new generation of journalists committed to promoting peaceful narratives. "Peace journalism opened my eyes to a whole new perspective in reporting. It's not just about covering conflicts; it's about actively working toward peace and reconciliation. Learning to bring rival factions together, prevent escalation, and contribute to lasting peace has been a game-changer for me. I am proud to say that I have not only learned it myself but also imparted this vital knowledge to the trainees I worked with."

In digital media, Manzoor gained valuable insights into engaging audiences and delivering concise yet informative content. This training program greatly enhanced his video storytelling skills, as seen in his impactful coverage of the struggles faced by the people of Balochistan after floods and their helplessness during the winter season.

Additionally, the training program expanded Manzoor's understanding of gender issues, leading him to incorporate women's perspectives in his reporting. For instance, in his story on high inflation in Balochistan, he highlighted the specific ways in which inflation affected both men and women, shedding light on the gendered impacts of economic challenges.

Crucially, the project also equipped Manzoor with a comprehensive understanding of international safety standards and protocols for reporting in conflict zones. He now prioritized both his own safety and the security of his sources. This newfound awareness allowed him to conduct stories in risky environments while adhering to vital safety measures previously absent from his routine.

With his enhanced skills, knowledge, and commitment to responsible journalism, Manzoor embarked on a path of impactful storytelling. His inspiring journey perfectly aligns with the core objective of the project, which aimed to empower young journalists in Balochistan to practice conflict-sensitive journalism. His responsible reporting demonstrates the project's success in fostering a new generation of journalists promoting peace, understanding, and unbiased storytelling in the region.



Mehrab: A Young Journalist Who Dreamed of an Independent and Gender-Balance Media in Landi Kotal

"Journalism is not just about sensationalism or one-sided narratives. It's about presenting the truth in a fair and unbiased manner, even if circumstances are challenging."

—Mehrab Afridi, Landi Kotal —

Following his love for journalism, Mehrab abandoned his International Relations degree midway to pursue a degree in media studies. Hailing from the conflict-sensitive region of Landi Kotal (District Khyber), he understood the power of media in bringing about positive change in his community. When he was selected to participate in the training under the "Inspiring Next Generation of Independent Media" project, Mehrab knew that this was his chance to fulfill his long-held dream of making a meaningful impact through journalism and be a catalyst for positive change in his community.



Mehrab is the President of the Landi Kotal Press Club. During the training, he realized the importance of establishing a robust constitution for the club. He committed himself to immediately work on drafting the constitution after the training. With his training mentor's guidance and colleagues' support, Mehrab meticulously framed and implemented the constitution for his press club. He shared, "The constitution is the backbone of any press club. The constitution of our press club ensures ethical practices and accountability among journalists."

Reflecting on his reporting before the training program, Mehrab admitted that his stories lacked balance. The training program instilled a deep understanding of balanced reporting, encompassing diverse perspectives and giving voice to all stakeholders. "Journalism is not just about sensationalism or one-sided narratives," Mehrab stated, "it's about presenting the truth in a fair and unbiased manner, even if circumstances are challenging." He recently reported the incident at the Pak-Afghan border with responsibility and tried to calm down the situation.

Training in digital journalism proved to be a game-changer for Mehrab. Through the training program, he sharpened his videography, video editing, and online storytelling skills. Using digital platforms, Mehrab highlighted pressing issues in his community, such as water scarcity. "Digital journalism allows us to reach a wider audience and shed light on critical issues that otherwise go unnoticed. It's a powerful tool for creating awareness and driving meaningful change," Mehrab remarked.

Exposure visits were a significant part of Mehrab's training journey. These visits facilitated networking opportunities, enabling Mehrab to secure a position as a PTV representative from Landi Kotal. The firsthand experience of broadcasting live programs and witnessing modern studio setups expanded Mehrab's horizons.

Mehrab, a staunch advocate for gender inclusivity, realized that the press club needed to be more welcoming and supportive of female journalists. With this goal in mind, he spearheaded efforts to amend the press club's constitution, easing the membership terms for women. Mehrab emphasized, "Women journalists bring unique perspectives and insights to the table. It is crucial to create an inclusive environment that encourages their participation and amplifies their voices." Currently, there is no women member in the press club, but Mehrab is accepting two to four women in the next few weeks .

While this story was being developed, we got the news of the first woman journalist becoming a member of the Landi Kotal Press Club.



In the next five years, Mehrab aims to empower aspiring journalists, especially women, by creating skill-building opportunities and mentorship programs. Mehrab also plans to build capacities for conflict-sensitive journalism, promoting unbiased reporting and ethical practices. Additionally, he aims to raise awareness about environmental issues and inspire action for a sustainable future through media.

Seema Wazir: Empowering Journalism in a Male-Dominated Society

"Ever since passing out from my university, I had been feeling the void of practical skills and longing for an opportunity to apply my knowledge. SFCG provided me with that much-needed chance to grow and develop, empowering me with practical experience and paving the way for a fulfilling career."

—Seema Wazir, South Waziristan —

Seema Wazir, a determined and passionate woman, defied societal norms and pursued her dream of becoming a journalist in the challenging regions of DIK and South Waziristan. Despite facing cultural impediments, she embraced the sacrifices that come with being a trailblazer in her community.



As a freelancer for an Urdu newspaper, Seema fearlessly reports on political and peace-related news in the conflict-sensitive area of Wana, South Waziristan. Recognizing the significance of media literacy and practical skills, she enrolled in a ten-day training program under the "Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan" project that transformed her journalism perspective. Seema described this in these words, "Ever since passing out from my university, I had been feeling the void of practical skills and longing for an opportunity to apply my knowledge. SFCG provided me with that much-needed chance to grow and develop, empowering me with practical experience and paving the way for a fulfilling career."

The practical aspect of the training program allowed Seema to explore modern photography techniques and refine her videography skills. Learning the intricacies of different shots, angles, and compositions has elevated the professionalism of her visual storytelling. "I am thankful to Search for Common Ground for this invaluable experience that was missing from my mass communication degree education"

Reflecting on her university education, Seema acknowledged the limitations of theoretical teachings. However, the training program gave her a comprehensive understanding of journalism through its five modules. She particularly mentioned the “Gender and Journalism” module that enhanced her reporting skills and incorporated a gender perspective in her work. Seema aims to utilize this knowledge to advocate for the rights of women and transgender individuals in Wana, amplifying their voices through the power of cinematography.

In a conflict-sensitive environment, Seema realized the importance of recognizing the news that contained misinformation and disinformation matter. “Previously, it was common practice to transmit information without verification, perpetuating a cycle of unchecked reporting.” However, after the training, she has committed to verifying facts before incorporating them into her reporting ensuring accuracy and ethical journalism.

The mentorship and fellowship program that followed the training played a pivotal role in empowering Seema to overcome her shyness. In a male-dominated society, she initially faced challenges when conducting interviews or reporting in public places. Still, with the encouragement and support from her mentor, she gradually shed her inhibitions. The program instilled the confidence to assert her talents and make her voice heard.

When discussing the necessary improvements to the mass communication syllabus at her university, Seema highlighted the need for practical modules and a shift toward hands-on experience. “Rather than over-relying on historical perspectives, I encourage the student to engage in fieldwork.” Seema believes that incorporating practical skills will equip aspiring journalists with the necessary tools to thrive in the ever-evolving media landscape.

Seema Wazir's story epitomizes resilience, determination, and the transformative power of training. By defying societal expectations and embracing the challenges of reporting in conflict-affected regions, she has emerged as a symbol of empowerment for women in journalism. Seema's unwavering commitment to amplifying marginalized voices and her dedication to evolving her skills serve as an inspiration to aspiring journalists.

Seema Wazir's success story aligns perfectly with the project's objectives of empowering women in media and promoting conflict-sensitive journalism. Despite facing cultural barriers and working in a male-dominated society, Seema's determination to excel as a journalist demonstrates the project's impact in preparing media actors to tackle challenges in conflict-sensitive regions.



Unleashing Potential: Shah Faisal's Commitment to Amplify Voices Through Journalism

"One of the most valuable aspects of this training program was the exceptional follow-up and mentorship that reinforced and deepened our understanding of the knowledge gained during the intensive ten-day training. It provided us with ongoing guidance and support, ensuring that our acquired skills and insights were firmly embedded in our professional practices."

—Shah Faisal, Quetta —

Shah Faisal, a person with a disability, is a promising journalist from Balochistan. After graduating from Balochistan University in Mass Communication last year, he has worked freelance for prominent media outlets like Voice of America and Asia Today for the past year. While Shah Faisal is still establishing himself in the field, his participation in the "Inspiring Next Generation of Independent Media" training program proved to be a transformative experience.



Unlike his previous training, which focused primarily on theoretical aspects, this program stood out for its practical approach and selection of skilled trainers. Shah Faisal found himself actively engaged in real-life scenarios where he had to find solutions to various challenges. This exposure prepared him to face the dynamic nature of journalism. "One of the most valuable aspects of this training program was the exceptional follow-up and mentorship that reinforced and deepened our understanding of the knowledge gained during the intensive ten-day training. It provided us with ongoing guidance and support, ensuring that our acquired skills and insights were firmly embedded in our professional practices."

Two of the five modules covered in the training program deeply impacted Shah Faisal. The first was "Gender and Journalism," which broadened his understanding of gender concepts and their relevance in news reporting. With this newfound knowledge, Shah Faisal worked on the story of Mubarakah, a woman who became disabled due to a tragic accident.

Through his cinematography, Shah Faisal shed light on Mubarakah's struggles and the pressing issue of traffic accidents in Balochistan, which claim more lives annually than acts of terrorism. Additionally, he addressed the alarming decline in female literacy rates in the Pishin district, emphasizing the urgent need for educational reforms.

As a person with a disability, Shah Faisal also found the module on "Safety and Security of Journalists" particularly valuable. Learning to ensure his safety while reporting in conflict-ridden areas empowered him to navigate challenging environments confidently. "As a person with disability, this training equipped me with valuable skills to excel in journalism and ensure my safety in challenging reporting environments. I've learned how to cope with the potential risks and secure my well-being while pursuing impactful stories."

Recognizing the importance of digital media skills in today's journalism landscape, Shah Faisal devoted particular interest to the module on digital techniques. Embracing the era of digital media, he acquired expertise in video editing and other digital tools. Collaborating with his colleague, Shah Faisal took on roles behind the camera and utilized his newfound skills to enhance their stories. "As a person with a disability, I faced challenges handling heavy camera equipment. However, thanks to the handy gadgets and starter kit provided by Search for Common Ground, my problems have been resolved. It has empowered me to capture powerful stories without limitations."

Looking ahead, Shah Faisal envisions a future where he continues to make a significant impact as a journalist. With his passion for gender equality and social justice, he aims to bring marginalized voices to the forefront and inspire positive change. "In the future, I am determined to give more space and visibility to the issues faced by persons with disabilities through the lens of my camera and the power of my pen. I want to amplify their voices, shed light on their experiences, and advocate for their rights. I will continue my struggle for a positive change and a more inclusive society. "Aligning with the project's objectives, Shah Faisal's success story exemplifies the promotion of independent and conflict-sensitive journalism by empowering young journalists like him.

Shah Faisal said, "This training program opened my eyes to the practical realities of journalism. It enabled me to approach reporting from a gender perspective, highlighting the issues faced by women in our society. Moreover, emphasizing safety and security has equipped me to overcome reporting challenges in conflict areas. Additionally, mastering digital media techniques has given me a competitive edge in the industry."



Sidra's Path to Empowerment: Championing Women in Journalism

As one of the fortunate students chosen for the training, Sidra has not only absorbed the valuable knowledge herself but also shared it with her classmates, effectively amplifying the impact of the training.

—Sidra Hassan, Peshawar —

Sidra, an ambitious media studies student, embarked on an enlightening odyssey through the training program that equipped her with the tools and insights necessary to thrive in journalism. Initially perceiving journalism as limited to reporting and editing, the training exposed her to many opportunities and expanded her horizons. Interacting with seasoned journalists during the training program organized under the project “Inspiring the Next Generation of Independent Media in Pakistan” broadened her knowledge and reshaped her perspective on the field.



There was much for Sidra to learn and reflect on in the training program. The digital media module during the training turned Sidra's focus to documentary-making and videography, unlocking new avenues for creative expression. Mastering the art of pitching ideas and conducting interviews further honed her skills, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application, which needed to be improved in her university education. Reflecting on the training, Sidra emphasized its crucial role in addressing vital topics like gender, which had been neglected in her academic curriculum.

Motivated by a drive for change, Sidra is now determined to thrust gender-sensitive issues into the spotlight of mainstream journalism. With a particular focus on women's property rights, she plans to produce stories that empower women to assert their rightful claims. Additionally, Sidra is resolute in her mission to investigate and expose the pervasive wage disparity between male and female professionals in the industry, leveraging her platform to raise awareness and advocate for equal pay.

Breaking free from societal constraints that confine female journalists to limited domains, Sidra is poised to challenge stereotypes by fearlessly delving into complex journalist beats such as courts, elections, and political rallies. Through her determination, she aims to bolster the image of women in journalism, inspiring others to embrace demanding reporting areas. Sidra's commitment to promoting gender equality and amplifying women's voices showcases her readiness to make a mark in journalism.

"Hailing from a conflict-sensitive area, I have learned the importance of conflict-sensitive journalism during my training. I now understand the power of unbiased reporting and its potential to bring about positive change in my community," says Sidra, reflecting on the benefits of the training. By practicing conflict-sensitive journalism, she aims to give voice to marginalized communities, highlight their struggles, and promote dialogue and understanding among conflicting parties.

As Sidra's journey continued, she remained committed to pursuing impactful journalism. She still has two years in the university before she enters the world of professional journalism. Still, she visualizes that with each story she will tell, each documentary she will craft, and each voice she will amplify, she aims to contribute to a more inclusive, informed, and equitable society. Her dedication to her profession and her passion for social justice positioned her as a beacon of hope, inspiring others to follow in her footsteps.

Sidra's story aligns perfectly with the project objectives of institutionalizing conflict-sensitive journalism in local universities and enhancing the capacity of young journalists. As one of the fortunate students chosen for the training, Sidra has not only absorbed the valuable knowledge herself but also shared it with her classmates, effectively amplifying the impact of the training. Her dedication to promoting gender-sensitive reporting represents the project's aim of empowering young journalists and providing them with the resources and skills to champion conflict-sensitive journalism. Sidra's story shows the project's success in nurturing a new generation of journalists committed to fostering peace and harmony through their work.



Our Mission

End violent conflict. It's our purpose — our call to action.

Instead of tearing down an existing world, we focus on constructing a new one. We do this through a type of peacebuilding called conflict transformation. Meaning: we look to change the everyday interactions between groups of people in conflict, so they can work together to build up their community, choosing joint problem-solving over violence.

Our mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions.

Our Vision

Our ability to deal with conflict affects how we handle every issue humanity is facing. Whether global in nature, such as poverty, hunger or the environment, or closer to home, such as family or community relations, we face daily challenges to our abilities to deal with conflict constructively.

So, our vision is of a world where:

Differences stimulate social progress, rather than precipitate violence.

Respect for and cooperation with those we disagree with is considered the norm for individuals, communities, organizations, and nations.

What we Do

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND is the largest dedicated peacebuilding organization. Since 1982, we have worked to end violent conflict and to build healthy, safe, and just societies all over the world. Currently, we work in 31 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America.



**Search for
Common Ground**
Trust, Collaboration, Breakthroughs

Washington, DC Headquarters:
1730 Rhode Island Ave NW Suite 1101,
Washington, DC 20036, USA
+1 202 265 4300

Country Office, Pakistan:
16 - 1st Floor, Executive Complex,
G 8 - Markaz | Islamabad | Pakistan