

Strengthen Resilience to
Violence Extremism through
Community Radio
in Bangladesh



**Bangladesh NGO Network for
Radio and Communication**
www.bnnrc.net

ACRONYMS

BNNRC	Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication
CSO	Civil Society Organization
C R	Community Radio
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
D I	Democracy International
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
PSA	Public Service Announcement
LER	Locally Elected Representatives
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer

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Preface:

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) is in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accredited with World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) of the United Nations and UN WSIS prize winner 2016 and Champion 2017.

BNNRC's outreach extends to local, national and international forums for communicating Knowledge for Media. BNNRC's approach to media development is both knowledge-driven and context-sensitive, and it takes into account the challenges and opportunities created by the rapidly changing media environment in Bangladesh including community radio development giving voices for the voiceless.

BNNRC now strives for the following core interventions to contribute in achieving 7th five Years Plan of Government of Bangladesh, UN World Summit on the Information Society (UN WSIS) Action Plan, and UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) through: Community Media Development (Community Radio & Community TV Community Film) for amplifying voices for the voiceless, Right to Information (RTI) for ensuring improved livelihood of the marginalized, ICT for Development for Bridging the Digital Divide in rural areas, Amateur Radio or HAM Radio for Disaster Risk Reduction, Community Film for Social Transformation. BNNRC is actively working to improve recognition of the community electronic media sector (Community Radio, Community TV, Community Film) & its work in and involvement with the communities.

BNNRC represent the community electronic media sector to Government, Industry, Regulatory Bodies, Media, Academia and Development Partners from 2000. BNNRC is supported by contributions from different development organizations worldwide who share a commitment in building a free, independent and pluralistic community media of voices for the voiceless.

Violent extremism is a threat that knows no borders, highlighting the vulnerability of all societies today to the challenges of intolerance, hatred and fear in Bangladesh.

There is no single cause for the rise of violent extremism – nor is there a single trajectory leading someone to extremist violence. We know also that 'hard power' is not enough to counter a threat that draws on exclusive visions of the world and builds on false interpretations of faith, fuelled by hatred and intolerance.

We need 'soft power'. It is not enough to counter violent extremism – we need to prevent it. No one is born a violent extremist. Violent extremists are made and fuelled by some miscreant drivers of our society.

Youth and Youth women in Bangladesh hate violent extremism – we must teach them peace. Violent extremists promote fear and division – we must respond with opportunities for citizen’s engagement, with skills for intercultural dialogue. Violent extremists preach exclusion and hatred – we must teach human rights, dignity, tolerance and solidarity. Violent extremists breed on mistrust and fears of others, on a lack of confidence in the future. We must provide Youth and Youth women with a renewed sense of belonging to our society with a new vision of the future.

This must start from all corners of our society by empowering Youth and Youth women in Bangladesh with the right values, skills and behaviours to make the most of diversity, to increase effective Political Participation through Multi –Generation Reach, to develop a more inclusive Public Space through Multi- Platform Presence & Multi –Generation Reach and to Influence Power for Improving responsiveness from power holders, to find decent employment, to live as good citizens, defending human rights and fundamental rights and duty in every instance.

All of this matters for new forms of Informal education, a new focus on advancing cultural and media literacy, to defend humanity’s shared cultural heritage, new approaches to bolstering community media and digital and information literacy, to strengthen the resilience of societies against this false direction of life, to organize inter religious dialog and social debate/dialogue fake news and siren calls of violent extremism and propaganda, to build media capacity for developing contents on preventing violent extremism, to strengthen the unity of all women and men as members of a family, and sharing aspirations and rights, a past and a future.

In response to the above phrases, Bangladesh NGO Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) implemented a one year long action research pilot project on Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism through Community Radio having partnership with two community radio stations – Community Radio Sharabela in Gaibandha and Community Radio Borendra in Naogaon district. The project was generously supported by Democracy International.

The action research pilot project has emphasized soft power approach on community engagement for Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) through community radio programs and outreach activities for social mobilization. Radio program included live discussion which is popularly known as talk show, magazine programs, broadcast of Public Service Announcement (PSA) and theme song. The outreach activities included group meetings, multi-stakeholders gathering, courtyard meeting, formation of youth listeners club etc.

This publication offers some examples of better experience and process about community radio program to prevent violent extremism in rural Bangladesh.

We hope that you will find this report describing the experiences and learning on Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism through Community Radio.

AHM Bazlur Rahman-S21BR
Chief Executive Officer



Executive Summary

Under the context of frequent incidents of violent extremism in different parts of Bangladesh during 2016 and 2017, it was emerging need to address the issue with due importance. Government of Bangladesh, NGOs and Civil Society Organization also took special program on preventing violence extremism.

Bangladesh NGO Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) implemented six month long an action research pilot project titled - Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism through Community Radio having partnership with two community radio stations – Community Radio Sharabela in Gaibandha and Community Radio Borendra in Naogaon district. The project was supported by Democracy International.

The action research pilot project has emphasized on community engagement for Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) through radio programs and outreach activities for social mobilization. Radio program included live discussion which is popularly known as talk show, magazine programs, broadcast of Public Service Announcement (PSA) and theme song. The outreach activities included group meetings, multi-stakeholders gathering, courtyard meeting, formation of youth listeners club etc.

The project played a catalyst role in connecting the Government Departments with the unemployed local youth groups for employment generation. The concerned senior officials of the Department of Youth, Department of Women Affairs shared the information for youth engagement for entrepreneurship and skill development schemes. This efforts was taken with key target of youth engagement in income generating activities, so that they have less attention for violence incidents.

The project contributed in taking paradigm shift in thoughts and perception of the community on violent extremism, as most of the community people had traditional attitude to see the violent extremism as a religious only, but their engagement in project activities such as participation in talk shows, magazine program and outdoor discussion sessions resulted in new knowledge, attitudes

and perceptions to consider the issue with a broader aspects and they started to contribute societal role in addressing the issue.

Community engagement in project activities was very much encouraging- the evidence shows that, during live talk show two radio stations received 600 telephone calls and among them 343 callers were responded by the panelists. In every episode of talk show, three guest resource persons from local community were participated in events to share and attend the listeners' queries.

Another success of this project is that, mostly the community owned the project activities; they considered the project interventions for their safety and resilience. This commitment was reflected in some volunteer contribution of the participants- a female college teacher has conducted a separate session with the students on Countering Violence Extremism issues apart from her regular academic classes.

Besides, 30 youth listeners formed a listeners club particularly to assist this project, the volunteers mobilized the community for their engagement with project outreach activities- such as group meeting with guardians, teachers, journalists, parents, marginalized communities etc. The community response was beyond to the expectation as more people participated in project activities and engaged themselves in social mobilization events.

The project contributed in better understanding on violent extremism, effective community engagement, promoted parental and societal role, enhanced working relation with GoB officials, youth engagement with public service on skill development, entrepreneurship opportunity and utilization of social media for preventing violent extremism.

BNNRC has played the facilitating and monitoring role in implementing this project which contributed in achieving project target and completion of work within the time frame. Again, BNNRC also played supportive role in enhancement of knowledge partnership with community broadcasters and the community targeted under this project.

STRIVE Project Team have innovation for sustainability of this project learning, the radio stations continued to broadcast the PSA as part of their social accountability, other key messages will also be included in some other radio programs and the project team will utilize their professionalism, learning and connectivity with society for other programs of the radio stations.

The project had significant contribution in knowledge sharing, sensitize the community on CVE issues and imparting resilience to the community to address the issues. Learning and experience from this project can be replicated in other similar projects in coming days.



LESSON LEARNED FROM ACTION RESEARCH

Section 1 : Background

Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism through Community Radio – STRIVE, a pilot project funded by Democracy International and implemented by BNNRC having partnership with Community Radio Sarabela in Gaibandha and Community Radio Barendra located in Naogaon district. The project started in July 2017 and closed in March 2018.

The goal of the project was to contribute towards strengthening community resilience in preventing and countering violent extremism.

The project was designed to achieve the following objectives;

- To enhance skills of young community radio broadcasters to address violent extremism
- To increase the understanding of rural community people regarding Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).

Methodology

To capture the project achievement, the learning, challenges and also the options followed to overcome the obstacles were discussed in a day long workshop in BNNRC office on 22 March 2018, where 4 producers and broadcasters from Radio Sharebela and Radio Borendra participated. BNNRC officials, Official from Democracy International and an external facilitators were present in that lesson learned workshop.

Structured questions were used to capture the learning, the producers and broadcaster also shared their experience in implementing the STRIVE project.

Major Interventions of the project

Baseline Survey

At initial stage of the project interventions, a baseline survey was conducted in 8 villages under 6 unions in the broadcasting areas of Community Radio Sarabela in Gaibandha and Community Radio Borendra in Naogaon. The aim of this baseline survey was to understand the level of knowledge and awareness of the community people on violence extremism issues in two community radio stations' broadcast areas.

A set of structured questions was used for the survey where basic questions on violent extremism and the roles of community radio was mentioned. The sample size was 192 covering both male and female respondents.

Section 3 : Project Interventions

The project activities can be classified under three categories

- a) Capacity and skills development of community broadcasters in addressing violent extremism
- b) Production and on air of radio programs on prevention of violent extremism targeting the community listeners.
- c) Social Mobilization through outreach activities

a) **Capacity and Skills Development of community broadcasters :**

In line with project document, BNNRC organized a 3 days orientation course for community broadcasters in Dhaka where 12 persons from two community radio stations participated, the participants included Station Managers, Program Producers, Fellows, Finance Officer and program presenters. Experts from relevant areas at national level facilitated the orientation course.

The participants were imparted knowledge on violent extremism, its impact and prevention through radio program and outreach activities. Based on the learning from orientation course, the participants produced a Program Manual where the possible contents were identified. The orientation course was diversified with some new dimensions such as psychological and social media aspects of preventing violent extremism, and were included in the course.

This basic course was followed by station level orientation having two segments - half day session on theoretical part of CVE issues and the latter half day session on CVE related reporting. A total of 35 participants (10 community radio broadcasters + 25 selected stakeholders from the locality) took part in these workshop.

b) **Production and on air of Talk Shows**

Under this project, both CR stations produced total 48 live talk show (24 +24) covering 25-30 minutes in each program. In every episode 3 local guest resource persons took part in discussion and listeners had the opportunity to ask questions to the panelists. Key content of discussion in talk show were- ideological conflict and violence, social media and ideological violence, social harmony and solidarity, causes of violent extremism and preventive measures such as employment generation, life skill development, co-curriculum activities and other social dimension of violent extremism.

Discussant of the talk show were also from local community such as teachers, local public representatives, social elites, religious leaders, women leaders, journalists, guardians, listeners club members, Government officials –such as District Women Development Officer, Youth Development Officer, Officials from Law Enforcing Agencies etc.

c) Production and On Air of Magazine Programs

A total of 48 magazine programs were produced and broadcasted from two radio stations during the implementation period. Magazine programs were designed by giving priority on a report on local prevention of violent extremism, other segment included short drama, songs on peace, harmony and solidarity, public opinion, tips and relevant news published in local newspapers. Hallo Gaibandha /Hallo Naogaon was also an interesting segment of this program.

Representatives from youth groups, guardians, local eminent persons, government officials, teachers, doctors, psychologists took part in different segments of this magazine program,

d) Theme Song

A theme song was composed and tuned for on air having duration of 4 minutes. Basically this song served for branding the project through its frequent on air. This song was used as the signature tune of each radio programs aired under STRIVE project, apart from talk show and magazine program, this theme song was also on air several times daily through both CR stations.

e) Public Service Announcement (PSA)

A total of 5 Public Service Announcement (PSA) on Preventing Violence and Extremism and urge for tolerance and peace keeping were produced and broadcasted by both community radio stations.

f) Social Mobilization through Outreach Programs

Besides, broadcasting radio programs, the broadcasters have organized social mobilization programs for connecting the community people and offering an open platform for direct interaction. As part of this initiative two multi-stakeholders' gatherings were organized where 120 members from different parts and groups of the community participated. Among the participants, the journalists, teachers, housewives, parents, development activists, doctors, cultural activists and representatives of ethnic groups expressed the views on the topics and expressed their solidarity and support for co-existence of different ideology and thoughts and conflict resolution through negotiations and knowledge sharing in a peaceful way.

Group Meetings: A total of 32 group meetings were organized by both community radio stations in their broadcast areas. The separate group meetings were organized with students, teachers, guardians, journalists, religious leaders, social workers, house wives etc. Listeners' Clubs have extended their support in organizing these meetings. A total of 960 persons (recorded) have participated in these group meetings.

Court yard Meetings: A total of 24 courtyard meetings were organized to sensitize the community where 720 community persons including 50% female members participated. In this traditional method of awareness raising, the community people got awareness against violent extremism and they become sensitized to take care of their children and earned own resilience against terrorism

Formation of Youth Listeners Club

Two Youth listeners' clubs were formed consisting of 30 interested and enthusiastic youths from the target listeners who mobilized other youths and community people to listen the radio programs on CVE issues. These volunteers extended their cooperation to engage other youth forces of the community in preventing and protecting countering violent extremism.

Reporting Mechanism

The focal person employed for this project in each radio station prepared monthly report based on a reporting format (MIS) provided by BNNRC on CVE situation in their respective area. The relevant information was collected from the reliable sources such as -local police station, hospital, government security intelligent services and local media. The edited version of those reports was also broadcasted as monthly special radio bulletin. Besides, each radio stations have organized quarterly progress review meetings accordingly.

Section 4 : Result Areas of Program Interventions

Better Understanding on Violent Extremism: Strive Project interventions contributed for better understanding on violent extremism related issues, ideological conflict, miss- use of religion sentiment and beliefs in creating conflict. Before program interventions, most of the community people had a narrow idea that, ideological conflicts is only a religious issue. But because of community participation in dialogue, stakeholders meeting, group meetings and radio programs, significant changed observed in their knowledge, attitudes and perception. Now they think violent extremism from a border perspective, such limited scope for freedom of expression, absence of democratic culture in the society, Ndiscrimination and oppression to minority groups, violation of human rights for a long period, autocracy in running the state, non-consideration of grievance of particular groups and other reasons.

Enhanced Civil Role : As a result of radio programs on preventing violent extremism, the community people played the vital role as watch dogs and acted as social agent to resist the violence in the society.

Better community engagement: STRIVE project enhanced opportunities for more community engagement in community radio programs, which promoted community ownership of the radio station. A total of 148 persons took part in radio talk for the first time and more than 1000 community persons engaged in different outreach programs. During the live talk show program, 345 listeners had made telephone calls to the panelists, though all the calls were not responded due to time constraints.

Parental and Societal Role Promoted

Community Ownership and Self-Motivation for Knowledge Sharing

Mr. Abul Kalam Azad, Head Master of Dariapur Aman Ullah High School. He took part in STRIVE Project Orientation session, discussion session, magazine program and multi-stakeholder meeting.

His personal assessment is that, he had primary idea on violent extremism, but from his active participation in radio program and outreach activities, he is now more knowledgeable on this issue, particularly the psychological aspects of extremism, importance of social bondages and societal roles for countering violent extremism is new learning for him.

Now he considers himself as a social agent to disseminate his learning on this issue, from this realization he shared his learning from STRIVE Projects with colleagues and he also disseminated the key messages for developing and practicing culture of prevention against violent extremism to his students while his regular academic class is over.

Both online and offline programs contributed to enhance parental and societal role in addressing violent extremism. The guardians were mostly convinced to strengthen family relationship and community role for conflict resolution enhanced, particularly special attention as parental care contributed to prevent violent extremism in the society due to self-realization of the guardians.

It was also noticed that, the relationship between community broadcasters and local community enhanced through this project and the number of listeners also increased. day.

Better relationship with GoB Officials: This project contributed to make an effective bridge between the community and local government administration. Law enforcing agencies extended all sorts of supports and cooperation to CR initiatives in addressing violent extremism, even the female Additional Police Super, Naogaon engaged herself for voice over for production of PSA at CR Borendra, which indicate effectiveness of institutional linkage and mutual cooperation for positive change.

Facilitated employment creation : The radio programs addressed the root causes of violent extremism such as unemployment, cultural deficit etc., for addressing the issues, the resource persons such as District Women Affairs Officer, District Livestock Officers, Deputy Director of the Department of Youths shared the information on youth engagement with their respective department, shared training information and loan linkage and financial support to develop career as entrepreneurs. These initiatives facilitated employment generation in local areas.

Promoted Social Media Role for CVE

During group and multi-stakeholder's issues of discussion included - positive utilization of social media as tool for countering violent extremism, minimizing ideological conflicts and develop the culture of plurality in the society. It was noticed that most of the guests have posted program photos reflecting their participation in talk show and key points of discussion in the social media.

Ms. Towhida Mahmud lecturer in the department of Information & Communication Technology in Kansipara Degree College under Gaibandha district

She was a participant of Radio Magazine Program and Multi stakeholders meeting. After attending radio program and field level program, she acknowledged that, she is enriched with new information, new concepts and ideas and she is highly motivated to contribute in the society in preventing the incident of extremism and violence.

The outreach program of STRIVE project opened doors of her thoughts on importance of co curriculum activities and parental roles in creating motivation against violent extremism in the society.

From her self-initiative, she organized discussion session on highlighting the need for peaceful society, importance of youth engagement in anti-violence activities with the participation of college level students.

She also advised her students not use social media for expansion and provocation violence, rather utilization of ICT for self-employment such as engagement in out sourcing activities. She has strong commitment to continue.

Section 5: Effectiveness

Project contribution was targeted in **RP3 Model** which mean Response, Protect, Pursue and Prevent from radicalization and violent extremism. Findings shows that, the project activities contributed in those four areas; following evidence justifies the achievement logically.

Community responded positively, their direct and indirect participation in the events, phone calls, mass participation in open dialogues and interaction indicated active response and positive response to prevent and reduce violent extremism from the society.

The community protected and even encouraged the radio broadcasters to organize motivational events in more areas and they willingly extended support for organizing outreach events, and also pursued for similar program in the future. For example- college teachers (female) shared her learning with her students in a college class room after completion of her academic classes.

During project period and post project period, there is no incidence of violent extremism in project areas and there were no single obstacle from any corner in implementing project activities. Besides, with the cooperation of the community, a good number of suspected terrorists were arrested by the law and enforcement agencies.

Above mentioned evidence shows that, STRIVE project is a successful initiative in mobilizing the community for response, protect, peruse and prevent violent extremism.

Section 6 : Challenges and Limitation

The project faced some challenges and limitations but project team was very careful about the risk factors and tried their best to overcome those challenges. In some cases, they sought guidance from radio stations management and BNNRC for minimizing the risks.

Some challenges and limitations are mention below;

Breaking the traditional perception on violence extremism

Traditionally, the very common perception matured among the community people that, violent extremism is happened to due radicalization. This concept was matured as a result of massive campaign by a class of people and also a section of media to blame religion as a factor of violence. Community Radio Program and outreach activities were designed to break the traditional perception and to understand the issue from a boarder perspective including some other social, economic and political factors.

Less Participation of women in project activities

As a result of conservative societal role, women participation in project activities such as participation in radio programs, engagement of volunteers especially female guest participation in talk shows were not up to the mark, but in community gathering notable women participation was noticed.

Absence of Inter-religion dialogue in project activities

Inter religion dialogue could be good option for such a project, where peace and harmony is promoted rather than the social conflict. It was a missing area from program perspective.

Lack of Supportive Equipment

The project did not provide supportive equipment such as laptop, recorder, camera etc. as a result, the program team had to depend on limited equipment of radio stations and practically the team had to share the equipment with other program persons.

Local transportation was also a big concern for the program staff. Sometimes it became very difficult to manage local transport to reach in the program sides.

Lot of activities in short time

Volume of activities was high comparing the engagement of persons and time duration. In fact within 09 months two radio stations had to finish all the work as mentioned in the project document. The project officials were under pressure to carry out all the activities. Most of the project staff are running their studies at post-graduation level. They have to engage themselves for academic purpose also.

Uncomfortable Situation on Personal Information in Baseline Survey

The respondent had to provide their personal cell phone number and National Identity Number in answer sheet, which created a sense of fear and the respondents were feeling uncomfortable to provide personal information.

Section 7 : Best Practices

Orientation for Program and Finance Persons

The participants of lesson learned session acknowledged that, orientation on Strive Project for program and finance persons was a good initiative and they were highly benefited from the deliberation of national level experts in Dhaka and the learning contributed in production of program manual.

Facilitating Role of BNNRC

BNNRC served the facilitating role in maintaining the quality of project interventions and regular monitoring on timely actions was very much supportive in achieving the target and finish the project activities on time.

Community Engagement

The key focus of STRIVE Project was highest level of community engagement and motivation of community towards plurality of society and co-existence of people having different ideologies and views. The project concentrated on community participation in both on radio program and outreach activities, which resulted in better understanding on project goals and long-term relationship between the community and Community Radio Station.

Sustainability of the project learning

The project contributed in positive changes of attitude, knowledge and practices of the community people. So, the understanding on CVE issues will help them for a long time to prevent violent extremism in their respective society.

The STRIVE Project Team also achieved professional excellence in implementing such innovative project they will be able to include the key messages of this project in other programs. On air of the theme song and PSA produced by the project team can be continued as a part of radio program.

Value for Money: The project team developed Program Manuel as well as the PSA and composed theme songs, which saved the project expenditure.

Concluding Remarks: The lesson learned workshop findings indicate that, the project is successful in making the community resilient against violent extremism and social bondages was promoted for living together.