

Minutes of the Media Workshop Planning Meeting

Meeting date: 28.07.2020, Time: 6 pm. Medium: WebEx.

Participants

Rajat Roy, Calcutta Research Group (Chair)

Pranay Sharma, Senior Journalist

A.S. Paneerselvan, Senior Journalist, PANOS South Asia, The Hindu.

Sanjay Barbora, Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, TISS Guwahati.

Debasish Roy, Director General, Indian Jute Mills Association.

Shoaib Daniyal, Journalist, Scroll.in.

Suvojit Bagchi, Senior Journalist, The Hindu.

Samir Kumar Das, Honorary Director, Calcutta Research Group.

Piya Srinivasan, Calcutta Research Group.

Nandini Dasgupta, Calcutta Research Group.

Kusumika Ghosh, Calcutta Research Group (Moderator).

Utsa Sarmin, Calcutta Research Group.

Rajat Kanti Sur, Calcutta Research Group.

Proceedings:

Introduction

The meeting was introduced by the Chair. He briefly introduced CRG and its recent works related to the pandemic situation in India. He also gave a brief idea about the proposed media workshop in October. He said that the workshop will be a virtual one due to the current situation in mind. The main aim of the workshop will focus on the crisis of the migrant workers in the pandemic and how to engage media in the same. He focused on two main crisis areas. These areas are a public health system, migrant workers and the crisis in the economy. He asked the participants to share their views on it and gave some suggestions on the procedural and logistical suggestions to conduct the workshop.

The discussions had conducted on the following aspects:

Problems of the Migrant Workers

The migration issue right now has two major inputs. One came from the destination and another came from the source states. Both the interpretation has problems because while one looks at the state of employment, the other purely look at the state of remittance. The role of the state is not helpful in each of the cases. The media along with different research organizations need an integrated approach towards this problem. Otherwise, it is not possible only for the media persons towards the issues of glaring. The migrants want to go back to their erstwhile workplace due to lack of economic activities in their home states. The PDS

system is not working properly in many destination states. These problems should be highlighted in the media workshop.

Preparing a database and the role of the media

The story about the migrant workers gradually lost its importance from the mainstream media activities due to several other important issues (e.g. The India-China border conflict, the natural disasters in the eastern part of India, etc.). The data on migration is another problem. It is fragmented due to its nature of representation. The last data made public a decade ago had interesting statistics, 300 million people moving every year within the country it seemed innocuous and an economic miracle, without the reasons as to why people were moving. In 2011, it has been figured out that the rate of growth of the urban areas was higher than rural areas, and when we try to make sense and bear witness to what these disparate sets of information mean, you have millions of vulnerable people moving across the country with precarious jobs and without access to this economic growth. The editorials of newspapers are very critical of the government- generational convergence, while a younger generation is very sensitive to social media and very active there- there is a combination of the two and there is content for a lot of independent news creators regarding the migrants coming back home.

There are a lot of explanations for why migrant workers face such problems. One of the important things is the misunderstandings between centre and state is regarding the migrant issues. The Migrant workers' act of 1979 is not a solution. Proper documentation and database of the migrant workers is a problem. Recently jute industry- creates a central database of workers working for all ninety-two jute mills. The ESI database of the workers became very helpful to settle the matter. This can be done for the migrant workers also. Otherwise one could not understand the exact picture of the migrant workers. The proposed workshop should organize a concrete discussion on making the migrant database and how the media played an important role in it. The proposed workshop should focus on the stories from social media, web news portals etc apart from traditional print and electronic media. The workshop should concentrate on the solution to the problems of migrant workers and how media can help to suggest a solution.

Conduct a study on the employers

A study on the nature of the employers of the migrant workers in the urban areas should be done apart from making a database on migrant workers. This study will help to know how the employer organizations should involve in the process of preparing a database. It looks impossible due to the current attitude of the state agencies towards the migrant workers. The state agencies do not want to disturb the employers because of their attitude as the owner of the capital. The workshop should focus on this issue to understand the problem.

Impact of migrant workers in the local politics of the host state

The migrant workers also become the victims of the local politics of the host state. A study should be conducted on the impact of migrant workers' issues on the local politics of the host state. This would make us understand the existential crisis of the migrant workers. The proposed workshop should think about this.

Necessary steps to conduct the proposed media workshop

1. To get the media interested in the workshop.
2. To focus on contemporary issues.
3. Identify those persons who are writing on contemporary issues and focus on the different forms of media where it has been reflected.
4. Social media journalists should be involved and prepare some resource material for the workshop participants.

Suggestions & Resolutions taken:

The chair said that the meeting was organized to get an idea from the committee about the process to conduct the workshop. He also said that a media reader can be prepared based on the workshop.

1. There should be a notification of the workshop inviting applications from media practitioners and media scholars. Open selection combined with select recommendations always works better.
2. Other things like - number of participants, select themes, resource persons, etc. need to be settled so that the workshop notification can indicate the aim. Similarly, there should be some time planning so that media fellows can present their respective work. We need discussants for their studies. There are other aspects also.
3. Calcutta Research Group is building a "living archive" on the issues of migrant worker. The use of this archive should be increased. In this connection, social media should not be mixed up with electronic media, which is playing a great role now. Different media forms need to be taken into account. Also, photographs and their role should be studied.
4. It should be decided first that which story should be picked for the discussion. Then try to pitch the stories through newspapers, web magazines, bloggers, paper presenters should be involved along with vernacular media to get more intense results.
5. Policymakers should be involved in the discussion.
6. Some researchers should be involved to conduct field studies.
7. Start the process to connect concerned persons who can participate in the workshop. The process should start as soon as possible.
8. Organizing a conversation with the experts on the field. Three names have been suggested. They are a) Nandita Haksar, b) Ben Carlson c) Dolly Kikon.
9. A session should be dedicated to stream documentaries, podcasts etc. made by the young media activists.

10. Make the workshop more open. Do not make a captive audience.
11. The journalists should be identified and the committee should ask suggestions about the concept and goals of the workshop.
12. The focus of the workshop should be based on the contemporary and exclusive stories. This will attract the attention. Such stories should be figured out before doing this.
13. A press conference should be organized before the workshop to attract media attentions.
14. The organizers should increase their media outreach (both in print an electronic media and also in social media) to make the workshop more successful.

Samir Kumar Das, Honorary Director, CRG summarised the discussion. He thanked the participants for their valuable suggestions for the proposed workshop. He said that the discussion gave understandings of the attitude of the media in the recent crisis raised due to the pandemic situation. This discussion also helped to set the target of the media activities of CRG. The suggestions came from the noted media persons and academicians should keep in mind while organizing the workshop.

The meeting ended with the vote of thanks by the moderator.