



Bengali news for kids paves the way for **fair education**

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A striking report with disarmingly honest responses. As a result, Kanastara, the Bengali news for kids, supported by Free Press Unlimited, has made education in Bangladesh a lot fairer for many children. For many years, schools in the country had to deal with exam fraud, which especially benefited the children of wealthy parents. But that is now a thing of the past.

Written by Michiel Thijs

Studying hard all year only to see much less hardworking classmates passing with flying colours. Many students in Bangladesh had to deal with this frustration. The reason? Leaked exams. Rich parents left nothing to chance and bought exams from teachers. The exams were quickly spread through social media.

A report from the Bengali news for kids, Kanastara, shed light on this bad practice and painfully showed how widespread the problem was. “I no longer study for my exams, I get the answers beforehand anyway,” one of the students testifies laconically. “In this way, students who may not even continue their education, gain admission to study medicine or engineering. I do not understand how the government can still keep its head in the sand, the evidence is right there,” says another. The news of the fraud was eagerly adopted by other news channels in Bangladesh. The pressure arising from this media attention had effect: in 2016, not a single case of this type of exam fraud was noted.

Kanastara saw the light of day in 2013 and is part of Free Press Unlimited's WADADA News for Kids: a cooperation of TV and radio programs in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin-America. From the very beginning, Kanastara received support from Free Press Unlimited, with journalism training, organization development and capacity strengthening.

Annelies Langelaar, Project Officer at Free Press Unlimited, has just returned from Bangladesh, where she visited the Kanastara production team. She experienced for herself the challenges facing the news makers in the, still poverty stricken, country. “For a small, non-commercial player like Kanastara it is difficult to be profitable. If you want to report fully independently, then you must do it without support from the political corner or rich, influential donors,” she says. “Furthermore, press freedom in Bangladesh is under increasing pressure, which doesn't make it any easier for a programme like Kanastara. Media that sends content that is too controversial into the world, faces

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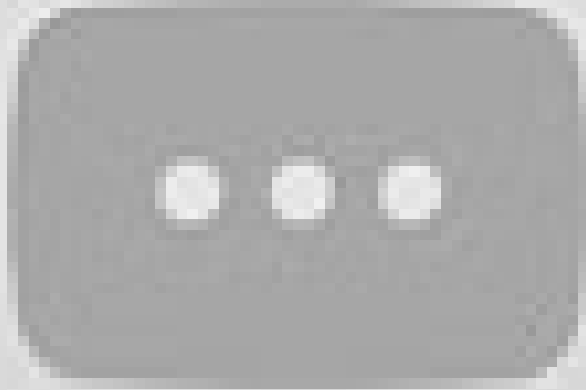
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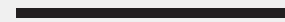
opposition from various parties. To continue to be self-sufficient, we are experimenting with different financial models. The local team is extremely creative, enthusiastic and professional, also in finding financial support that doesn't come from Free Press Unlimited."

Kanastara also holds an undeniable asset. As virtually the only medium, it gives a voice to a group within the Bengali community: children. Besides the items that are made by the Kanastara team, the children are given the chance to go out on the road with a microphone at the ready. The results of that are used in the broadcast. In addition, employees visit rural schools to teach children how to (critically) deal with the media. As the only medium, Kanastara succeeded in getting children who were guilty of exam fraud to testify. We can therefore safely say that Kanastara gives the children in Bangladesh a voice and trust. And that trust is mutual.

Watch the episode of Kanastara about exam fraude below (in Bengali).



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