Learning the Real Ropes in Print Media

Haroon Siraj, district correspondence for daily The Nation rediscovered his professional edge in a much mature way.

There are a few incidents in one’s life that change both personal and professional perspectives. After being part of the group during training, and immensely benefitting from the exercise, I have no qualms in saying that this training was one such event!

Selected for his professional commitment and dedication with the journalistic career, Haroon lives in a conflict prone area, Swat. Haroon Siraj is Correspondent of The Nation in Swat. He saw it with his own eyes the fear and terror of the Taliban reign in Swat, when in February 2008, he lost his father and nine other family members in a suicide attack during the funerals of his brother and law - who was also killed by Taliban. After the military operation, the displaced population returned but the area still faces the challenges of law and order where security forces still are combating the menace of terrorism.

Haroon says that being from a relatively backward area as compared to Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi, “many personal and professional deficiencies came to me on their own. From the very beginning, I had developed a keen interest in the Pakistani media and always wanted to play a leading role in the media mosaic in my area.” But he admits that excelling in his career; he did not need a conflict to engulf his peaceful valley in upper northern regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. “Those were difficult times and in all honesty, I now so truly wish if I had known the skill and professional approach that I was able to learn from the Primary and Advance Level Training that Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Pakistan imparted to me.” Haroon says that going through the training was an eye opening experience where “I was able to understand the professional dynamic of reporting, particularly, from the conflict zone – and that too on various kinds of conflicts.” In addition, Haroon also learnt many required subtleties of “reporting without editorial pun.”

“It is not easy in our society that is so politically charged to be without an opinion. This generally prevailing trend also seeps into your mood and you find yourself, as a journalist, issuing editorial comments and remarks ‘generously and frequently’ but this does not help the cause.”

He says that it was hard for him to understand the difference between many professional terms, codes of conduct, professional frameworks, theme of the Common Ground Approach and most importantly, reporting from a conflict-sensitive area. But it was past, he says and adds that his professional present and future is much more solid than before. “I am now confident on myself and would always use the techniques that I learnt to report on things impartially, with sensitivity and neutrally with one basic underlying thought: no sensationalism, positivity and contribution toward peacebuilding and conflict resolution.”

Haroon maintains that this training is indeed one huge event of his life that has changed his personal and professional perspective on the very issues that he has always worked on. “Such incidences are a rarity in one’s professional life in the areas I come from. And I am happy and grateful to SFCG Pakistan that I was part of the group whose life was changed.”

“When is the next training?” He asks cheerfully.