

বাংলাদেশ সংলাপ

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Bangladesh Sanglap



BANGLADESH SANGLAP



A DECADE OF TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA

bbcworldservicetrust.org



Getting voices heard:
Bangladesh *Sanglap*

Introduction



'Sanglap' is Bangla for dialogue, and it's a word which captures the ethos behind the pioneering TV and radio debate programme, Bangladesh *Sanglap*.

It began life in 2005 as a joint initiative between the BBC World Service Trust, the BBC's international development charity, and the BBC Bangla Service. Now, five years later, having helped establish a sustainable media platform, and as with many of the programmes we helped set up around the world, we are handing it over.

This booklet celebrates *Sanglap*'s success and achievements to date and looks at the ways in which it has made a very real difference not only to people's lives, but also illustrates how it has developed and diversified the political and media landscape of Bangladesh.

In many ways, it has been a brave undertaking. *Sanglap* was launched at a time of political turbulence in Bangladesh. But despite this, the programme has survived and flourished, helping to hold politicians to account and provide valuable information for members of the public during this volatile period.

The success of *Sanglap* is demonstrated by the audience research that has underpinned the work. In an online survey, 86% of those questioned said they felt the programme has improved political debate in Bangladesh and 78% believed the programme has helped to ensure transparency and accountability.

I would like to thank our partners on this project: the UK Department for International Development, our colleagues at BBC Bangla, and Channel i who broadcast the debates. We are also grateful to all the panellists and audiences who have pioneered the format, shared their voices and been heard.

Sanglap is a programme of which we at the BBC World Service Trust are immensely proud, and we wish our colleagues in BBC Bangla continuing success.

Caroline Nurse
Executive Director, BBC World Service Trust

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Sanglap's popularity has paved the way for the TV debate format in Bangladesh

> Overview

The BBC World Service Trust (BBC WST) approached BBC Bangla in early 2005 about a joint venture to produce a series of TV debates with a live audience, to discuss issues important to the people of Bangladesh. The time seemed ripe for such a venture – the government enjoyed a strong majority in parliament, but the opposition was boycotting the assembly.

A partnership was established with leading private TV company Channel i to film and broadcast the programmes. For TV audiences in Bangladesh, *Sanglap* was the first of its kind – a programme that enabled members of the public to question rival political leaders and civil society personalities. The BBC's reputation gave the public the all important confidence needed to trust that the programmes would be fair.

Following eight initial debates, we were thrilled to receive requests to continue the programme. It was felt that the format could help stimulate wider discussion in the country, which in turn would strengthen democracy in Bangladesh.

The new format *Sanglap* was launched in September 2006. General elections were less than five months away and a caretaker government was scheduled to take over to organise them. But with allegations of planned election rigging, a dispute over the composition of the caretaker government and threat of a boycott, prospects for a peaceful transition appeared slim.

The debates were now more important than ever, and during the two-year Emergency Rule, BBC Bangla and the BBC World Service Trust delivered further editions of *Sanglap*, to widespread acclaim.

Sabir Mustafa, Editor, BBC Bangla

IMPACT FACTS

- 146 episodes of *Sanglap* have been broadcast since 2005.
- *Sanglap* has attracted an audience of 21 million people on radio and TV.
- *Sanglap* viewers have a greater awareness of corruption.

"Sanglap has provided a platform for ordinary people to have the kind of debates that are happening all over the country - about politics, about services, about corruption - and do it in the media, with politicians taking part."

Chris Austin, Country Representative, DFID Bangladesh

"The most striking thing about Sanglap was the enthusiasm I saw among its participants. Members of the audience were thrilled to get an opportunity to voice their concern, anger or viewpoint not only to the panel but to the viewers."

Kamal Ahmed, Presenter, BBC Bangla



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Sanglap held the first ever nationally broadcast debate in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

> Giving people a voice

It was December 2007, and the first debate – in fact the first ever debate – was taking place in Rangamati, the principal town of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Members of the audience were uncharacteristically subdued during the first two questions that dealt with the latest twist in politics and the ten-year-old peace treaty that was supposed to end the insurgency in the area.

Then, a brave individual stood up to ask the third question. Why, he asked, does the government not allow mobile phone coverage in the area?

Suddenly, the audience became animated. People need to communicate it was argued, farmers need to find out crop prices. The government's protestations of security concerns didn't wash at all. It was nothing less than discrimination; a violation of human rights. A show of hands showed 100% of the audience agreed.

Eventually the debate moved on, but back in Dhaka, in the corridors of power, the hill people had been heard.

Three months later, the government announced it would extend mobile phone coverage to the entire Chittagong Hill Tracts. The last districts in Bangladesh – with a population of one million people – were finally to be connected.

David Prosser, Head of Programmes, BBC World Service Trust

IMPACT FACTS

- DFID's annual Output to Purpose Review gave *Sanglap* the highest rating possible. This was repeated in DFID's Project Completion Report.
- 86% of viewers felt *Sanglap* made politicians and government officials more accountable.

"The most important aspect of this programme is that it has brought out important issues and topics, particularly political and governance subjects, and it has helped many people to make up their minds and come up with their own opinions in terms of where Bangladesh is going and how it's progressing."

Manzoor Hasan, Director of the Institute of Governance Studies, BRAC University

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A boat proved the ideal means of transport when Sanglap went on tour

> Template for change

Taking an outside broadcast camera crew of over 100 people out on the road can be daunting, especially when you throw in the idiosyncrasies of Bangladesh – the roads and floods, heat and humidity, and a throng of more than 150 million people. But the fact that *Sanglap* travels around the country is a big factor in its popularity.

The format for *Sanglap* is modelled on the UK discussion programme *Question Time*. We drew widely on the experience of the BBC and organised for the *Sanglap* production team to shadow the programme's crew in the UK.

In turn, the *Sanglap* team members have been able to share their own experiences. Staff from the Bangladeshi national broadcaster BTV gained experience at one of our *Sanglaps*, as did the BBC World Service Trust Nepali team, who then launched their own TV and radio debate programme, *Sajha Sawal* (The Big Question).

The role that this culture of knowledge sharing has played can be seen in the success of *Sanglap*, which has prompted the launch of numerous debate programmes in Bangladesh, including one by BTV.

We are in a unique position to help launch new *Question Time*-style programmes anywhere it is necessary to increase accountability and we believe this format can work in many different environments around the world.

Working on *Sanglap* has often been challenging, but always rewarding.

**Michelle Ross-Stanton, Head of Production,
BBC World Service Trust**

IMPACT FACTS

- 87% of viewers said *Sanglap* created a forum for people to interact with policy and decision-makers.
- 46 political debate programmes are now aired each week in Bangladesh, compared to just nine programmes in total that were broadcast prior to November 2005.

"The opportunity to question policy-makers, politicians and government has become part of our culture in the UK, so we have perhaps forgotten what a valuable piece of democracy it is. But around the world it is definitely appreciated and audiences understand just how great an asset programmes such as BBC Sanglap are."

David Coleman, former Director of the BBC's Question Time

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The BBC World Service Trust takes *Sanglap* to the people, wherever they may be

> Reaching rural areas

Creating a buzz is important if you want to capture people's interest, and that's exactly what happened when the *Sanglap* video vans came to town.

We wanted to reach those people who were interested in politics but didn't have access to TV or listen to radio, particularly those in rural areas. Our novel solution? We took the TV to them, sending video vans into these areas to give people there an opportunity to watch the programme.

A 'spot selection team' of two people arrived ahead of the video van. They selected a venue to screen the *Sanglap*, sought permission from the local authority and then publicised the show with banners and leaflets. The *Sanglaps* were then shown using a big screen and overhead projector.

That's not to say it wasn't often a challenge. Local roads are very poor and slow, and it was frequently difficult to find places to stay.

But it was well worth the effort. The excitement amongst the public was palpable, with most screenings attracting over 1,000 people and sometimes as many as 5,000. Whole families came, eager to get a seat at the front of the screen. Having watched the show, many people told us they didn't know they could question politicians like that.

The video vans were a great success. In remote areas there is little entertainment and villagers enjoyed the novelty of screenings. Seeing the audience getting their first exposure to government issues, and learning about governance and accountability, was extremely exciting. After all, it's what we were there to do.

Sanjib Saha, Senior Research Officer, BBC World Service Trust

IMPACT FACTS

- 120 video van shows took place over six weeks, from November 2006 to January 2007.
- The video vans visited 60 different districts.
- The total audience was 188,406, which comprised 156,600 men and 31,806 women.

"We like Sanglap very much because most of the people in the remote areas do not have access to the political information of the country. Through this programme, we received useful information."
Man in Dhubaura, Mymensingh

"I didn't know that people like me can ask questions to politicians in this way."
Woman in Bheramara, Kustia



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At every step, research has informed the shape of Sanglap

> Research

Research underpins the work of the BBC World Service Trust, and *Sanglap* is no exception.

Throughout, research has been conducted both to inform the development of *Sanglap* and to measure its impact. This began with a national opinion survey, 'Pulse of Bangladesh', in 2005, which revealed an extremely low level of public trust in both politicians and government.

Equipped with this information, we set out to reach large audiences through radio and cable and satellite TV. We wanted to create a platform for political dialogue and develop the media in Bangladesh, fostering an environment for political talk shows and provide training for those working in media.

Five years on, our Endline Survey showed that *Sanglap* was reaching an audience of almost 21 million, through both television and radio.

But it is not just about viewing figures. We found that the programme engaged the audience, informed them of key issues, and in the process gained a higher rating than other political shows. As a result, *Sanglap* viewers were more informed about political issues and government activities, more likely to express their opinion and views, and participate more in political activity – across many parts of Bangladeshi society.

It is satisfying to be able to show that so many of *Sanglap*'s aims have been met. Our findings support the team and give them confidence that they are having not just impact, but the right kind of impact.

**Sonia Whitehead, Research Manager,
BBC World Service Trust**

IMPACT FACTS

- **92% of viewers thought *Sanglap* provided an opportunity to raise the 'voice of the people'.**
- **80% said it had established a good standard for political discussion programmes on TV and radio.**

"The talk show is creating a good environment for discussion, and people from the grassroots level are having the opportunity to express themselves and even ask questions to a minister."

Sanglap viewer, Sylhet (2009)

"In BBC Sanglap the viewers can directly participate in the show. They share their views and opinions, they protest if there is anything wrong. The viewers are asked for their opinions after the panellists deliver their speech. That is why I like it."

Sanglap viewer, Sylhet (2009)

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The BBC World Service Trust has helped build media capacity through extensive training

> Building capacity

When *Sanglap* began in 2005 there were many new TV channels in Bangladesh. However a big problem was that these had been launched quickly, with little time to organise training for staff.

We responded to this by commissioning research on the state of TV in Bangladesh. Out of the research findings came Media Capacity Building Training, the first training scheme of its kind, organised for all Bangladeshi TV channels.

Launched in 2009, the scheme comprised four training courses covering video package making, multi-camera skills, studio lighting and presenter training. This provided a valuable opportunity for directors, producers, cameramen, lighting engineers and other staff to develop their skills.

Special training was organised for the staff of the state-owned broadcaster BTV (Bangladesh TV) between September 2009 and January 2010. As the only terrestrial TV channel in Bangladesh, BTV's reach is more than double that of cable and satellite broadcasters. This training paved the way for an agreement with BTV to broadcast a drama series as part of our new English language project 'English in Action'.

The training's impact has been fantastic. It not only helped us to build relationships with the TV channels but meant they got training at an international standard.

The BBC had already established a strong reputation in Bangladesh, but the training provided by the BBC WST alongside *Sanglap* has strengthened this further.

**Mazharul Islam, Head of Operations,
BBC World Service Trust**

IMPACT FACTS

- 205 training and mentoring days were organised for national broadcaster BTV between June 2009 and January 2010.
- Training in video-package making was organised for partner Channel i during 2008.
- Evaluation of training courses showed that trainees' knowledge and skills had improved considerably.

"Thanks to BBC. If more training sessions like these are organised, it will help develop a strong media work force in Bangladesh. This type of training is very much required"
Participant on video Package Making course



In 2008, *Sanglap* gave the public the chance to question mayoral candidates

> Democracy and governance

In August 2008 mayoral elections were due to be held in the cities of Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal. We wanted to provide voters with as much information about the candidates as possible, so they could make an informed choice.

This is where the BBC World Service Trust came in, hosting a series of *Sanglap* debates, giving the public a platform to question the candidates. The first debate was held in Sylhet over the course of two days in July 2008 and was a huge success, gaining record viewing figures.

In total, seven *Sanglaps* were held in the four cities, with all the mayoral candidates (excepting one in Sylhet, who was under detention) participating. The subjects discussed were well researched by the BBC team, highlighting the issues important to people locally that an elected mayor should prioritise.

The month-long programme brought a fresh look to the campaign system, informed the voters about the candidates and marked a milestone for the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC).

Without doubt, the *Sanglaps* improved voter awareness, and their success prompted other private TV channels to follow suit and emulate the debates. The BEC also went on to use the same format in the recent city mayoral elections in Chittagong. These were fantastic outcomes from a great partnership between the BBC and BEC.

M. Sakhawat Hussain, Election Commissioner, Bangladesh Election Commission

IMPACT FACTS

- Audiences to Nirbachoni (Election) *Sanglap* in advance of city mayor elections on the state broadcaster BTV were approximately 21 million people.
- Nearly half the adult population of the four cities where the mayoral elections were held watched Nirbachoni *Sanglap*.

“The promises that the MPs and ministers have made are hardly held accountable. The common people do not get contact, but here in the programme they get the chance to ask them questions.”

Sanglap viewer, Sylhet Metro

“Sanglap ensures transparency of the political leaders.”

Sanglap viewer, Barisal Metro



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A special episode of *Sanglap* brought attention to the plight of those affected by Cyclone Sidr

> Responding to natural disaster

In November 2007, the 'Nodipathey Bangladesh' (Bangladesh by River) boat trip was touring the country to film four special editions of *Sanglap*, when Cyclone Sidr struck in the south.

We rushed down the next day and saw the devastation. Two weeks before we had held the *Sanglaps* there. Now we saw the same area, only it had been flattened and there were bodies everywhere. It was very upsetting.

We responded quickly, taking the decision for the boat to return to Mongla and broadcast a special *Sanglap* on the aftermath of the cyclone. We brought back many of the people who had been in the audience for the first programme. Some were injured but still keen to tell their stories.

In this time of disaster the Bangladeshi people wanted to talk to the media because they hoped their politicians and the world would hear. It was a huge challenge and emotionally charged, highlighting the plight of the Bangladeshi people. But it was an important programme and had a huge impact.

On the first anniversary of the cyclone, we returned to Mongla again and recorded another *Sanglap*. Many of the original audience members returned to tell us how they were faring a year later.

The BBC is much loved in Bangladesh, and the people really appreciate what we do there. There is no doubt that the programmes made things better, enabling people to voice their needs and explain their situation.

Shakeel Anwar, Presenter, BBC *Sanglap*

IMPACT FACTS

- Cyclone Sidr struck late on Thursday 15 November 2007 bringing winds of up to 240km/h and a tidal surge of several metres; it was the most destructive storm to hit Bangladesh in more than a decade.
- The cyclone claimed more than 3,300 lives (according to the British Red Cross).
- Some 500,000 homes were destroyed and 845,000 households affected.

*"In 2007, after the devastation of Cyclone Sidr, I was invited to attend the special *Sanglap* in Mongla. The audience spoke of their despair and they had plenty of questions for the panel."*

Syed Monsur Uddin, Editor, Weekly Surma

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The *Sanglap* London Special provided a unique forum for the British-Bangladeshi community

> Working with the UK community

Venues don't come much grander than London's City Hall, which is where a very special recording of *Sanglap* was held on 17 July, 2009.

An estimated 350,000 people of Bangladeshi origin live in the UK, and the first *Sanglap* to be recorded outside of Bangladesh had a packed audience – most of whom were from the British-Bangladeshi community.

British-Bangladeshi issues are not often debated in the UK's media. They are discussed in the community, sometimes raised on the community TV channels but not debated in a wider forum, particularly the way the issues were raised and discussed in *Sanglap* London Special. This special edition enabled the UK Bangladeshi community to debate issues of concern in their own language.

The questions ranged from the British-Bangladeshi community's political aspirations to issues concerning the UK curry industry and the effect of climate change. The most heated discussion focussed on the extradition from Britain of people who were alleged to have committed war crimes during the war of Bangladesh's liberation in the early 1970s.

London's *Sanglap* added a lively and unique insight into the issues important to the British-Bangladeshi community today, confirming its reputation for balanced debate and succeeding in its mission – dialogue.

Manoshi Barua, Senior Producer, BBC Bangla

IMPACT FACTS

- In Bangladesh 33% of the TV and radio audience is from rural areas.
- Almost 25,000 people participated as audience members in *Sanglap*.

"There was a very lively discussion. I think forums like this are useful for diaspora communities. It was a good idea that DFID and the BBC supported such an initiative."

Murad Qureshi, London Assembly Member

"This BBC Sanglap helped us to understand what Bangladeshis who are living abroad feel about their homeland. They have a good relationship with their homeland and contribute in terms of finance, culture and politics, and this highlighted the sort of issues they think about."

Mithila Farzana, Presenter, BBC Bangla

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Working closely with partner broadcasters in Bangladesh has helped make *Sanglap* the success it is today

> Partnership

Our relationship with the BBC began in 2005, when we entered into an agreement to record and broadcast the *Sanglap* programmes. When we first started transmission, the Ministry of Information in Bangladesh was hesitant about allowing us to continue. The *Sanglaps* included criticism of the government, which they weren't used to. Ultimately – and after much deliberation – we were allowed to continue broadcasting the programmes.

This was only possible due to the relationship and level of understanding that existed between the BBC and Channel i, both of which benefitted from the partnership. Transmitting the programmes at peak viewing time has led to a significant increase in Channel i's ratings, and it has helped to increase the popularity of the BBC Bangla amongst the urban population in Bangladesh.

The partnership between BBC Bangla, the BBC World Service Trust and Channel i has definitely had an impact on the media in Bangladesh. Now most of the country's TV channels broadcast talk shows along the lines of *Sanglap*, although few have been as successful. It has shown us that more is possible when we work together.

Esrarul Huq, Executive Director, Channel i, local broadcaster

IMPACT FACTS

- An endline survey found that Channel i is the most popular channel for political talk shows/discussions, followed by BTv.
- During 2009, a spin-off programme, *This Week in Parliament*, piloted on Channel i reached over eight million people.

"I think people by and large like the programme as it's one place they can openly ask questions, and as it's aired on a popular TV station, whatever they're saying will get the attention of someone in government."

Abul Mal Abdul Muhith, Bangladesh Finance Minister

Making their voices heard

Further highlights from *Sanglap*.



Above: Participation, governance and human rights are key issues debated on *Sanglap*.



Above: The 'Nodipathey Bangladesh' (Bangladesh by River) boat trip came at time when it was most needed by those affected by Cyclone Sidr.

Left: *Sanglap* has been promoted in Bangladesh through a unique advertising campaign.



Top: London's City Hall provided an impressive backdrop for a special edition of *Sanglap*.

Above: Part of *Sanglap's* enduring appeal amongst Bangladeshis is its accessibility.

Right: Presenter Stephen Sackur hosted an episode of the BBC World Debate from Dhaka.





Left: In 2008 the *Sanglap* team won awards at both the Sony Awards and BBC World Service Awards for their work on 'Nodipathey Bangladesh' (Bangladesh by River).

Below: Video vans toured the Bangladeshi countryside, screening *Sanglap* in difficult to reach rural areas.



What's next in Bangladesh?



In a country where 84% of our audience want to learn English, the BBC World Service Trust is involved in 'English in Action', a major project to improve English language skills in Bangladesh, supported by UKaid through the Department for International Development, utilising an innovative combination of television, mobile and online.



Above: English in Action's BBC Buzz is a weekly youth entertainment show, launched to place English at the centre of young people's everyday lives.

Left: BBC Janala has turned the mobile phone into a low-cost education device, offering hundreds of three minute audio lessons and SMS quizzes to the 50 million mobile users in Bangladesh today.



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Getting the message out:
Sanglap hoarding in Dhaka
before the first programme
in 2005

Credits

The BBC World Service Trust Bangladesh team and BBC Bangla would like to thank the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and our partners Channel i and BTV for their support in helping make BBC *Sanglap* the success it is today. A special thank you also goes to Esrarul Haq, Shykh Seraj, Shihab Sumon, Matiur Rahman Mithu, Manoj Sengupta, Kamrunnesa Hassan and Reazuddin Badsha.

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A key that fits the lock: we provide information to help people unlock potential and choices

About the BBC World Service Trust

The BBC World Service Trust is the BBC's international development charity.

We use the media to enable people to have access to life-changing information that can help them survive, shape their lives and thrive. Through the BBC tradition of 'Inform, Educate, and Entertain', we can open the door for people to make choices and find their own solutions to the challenges they face.

Across the world — in addition to Asia we also work in Africa, the Former Soviet Union, the Middle East and Eastern Europe — we use media to help people improve their lives.

We have provided advice to mothers on their families' health, helped citizens understand their rights in elections, we have rebuilt radio and TV stations destroyed by conflict, and been on the spot in the aftermath of disasters to provide radio lifeline services to those still reeling from the impact.

We have used drama series, youth phone-ins, documentaries, adverts, TV and radio debates. We have helped support traditional media in the form of books and print journalism training, and harnessed new media channels such as interactive websites and mobile phones. Our approach is simple: assess local needs, produce programmes, materials or support in response, and work with local partners to build skills and services that will be sustainable long-term.

We hope you enjoy this publication: it's a snapshot of some of the millions of lives that have been transformed by media through our work.

For those of you who have already supported us, thank you. And for those of you who are new to our work we hope that these stories and images may inspire you to support us across the next decade.

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