

# “Promoting Incubator Spaces as a Replicable Model for Multi-Disciplinary Learning among Higher Education Institutions”

A Toolkit on Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication





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#### Disclaimer

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## About the Toolkit

From January 2020, HELVETAS together with its partner SDJF collaborated with relevant heads of Departments of Media and Communication as well as undergraduate media and communication students of the Department of Agriculture Extension, University of Peradeniya (UOP), Department of Media Studies, University of Jaffna (UOJ), and Department of Sinhala and Mass Communication, University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP) to design, establish and adopt Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication to promote multidisciplinary learning, free expression, and innovation for the first time in Sri Lanka. The Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication was established under the Incubator Space for Promoting Information Right and Freedom of Expression (InSPIRE) project funded by the European Union. These multi-disciplinary learning spaces are creatively designed to foster a progressive environment to promote free and unrestricted thinking, to generate innovative ideas, exchange information, and engage in peer-to-peer learning.

This toolkit has been developed by HELVETAS in collaboration with the stakeholders from the three universities and SDJF to promote Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication as a replicable model for multi-disciplinary learning and innovation among prospective universities (national/ private) and other higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.

### Objectives of this Toolkit:

01

#### **INCUBATOR SPACES AS A REPLICABLE MODEL**

To Introduce the concept of Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication to universities/Higher educational institutes as a tool to promote multi-disciplinary learning, free expression, information exchange and innovative media expression.

02

#### **A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE**

To provide a step-by-step guide on the how to set up, operationalize and sustain Incubator Spaces

03

#### **SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE**

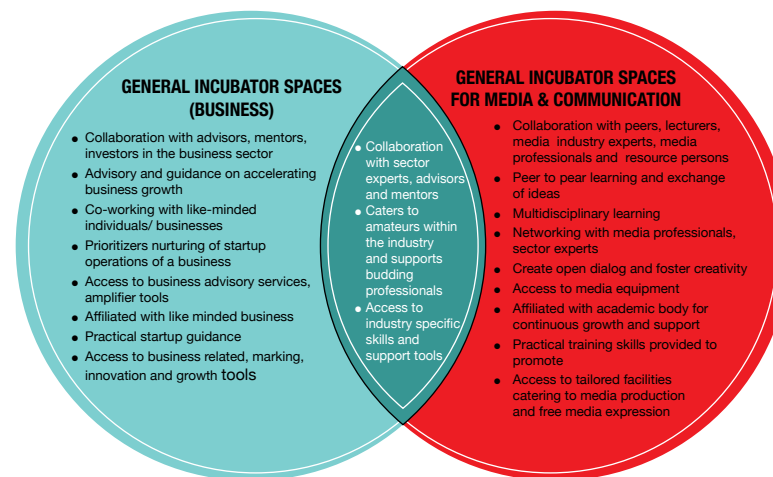
To share our experience, lessons learnt and good practices in designing, establishing and sustaining incubator spaces under the InSPIRE project

## What is an Incubator Space?

Incubator spaces are considered progressive spaces for learning, sharing, and networking. These spaces promote collaboration and development among stakeholders involved through providing necessary resources, support structures, and tools required for growth. In line with its innovative approach to achieving growth and development, Incubator Spaces can be varied in form and function which means, they can be custom designed based on its expected function to accommodate more specialized disciplines.

With business incubators gaining more popularity in the present day, some of the features of such incubators are <sup>1</sup>:

- Accessibility to resources under one roof (workspaces, equipment, facilities etc.)
- Collaboration with advisors, mentors, and investors
- Provide technical and functional support
- Engage like-minded individuals such as similar startups, sector experts, resource persons etc. Access to supportive services or specialized skill development such as finance, marketing, business management etc



1 ProQuest (2020). CHARACTERISTICS OF BUSINESS INCUBATORS - ProQuest. [online] www.proquest.com. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/b6c8f097d9fe9be21a2e07356704d914/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=616471> [Accessed 11 Nov. 2022].

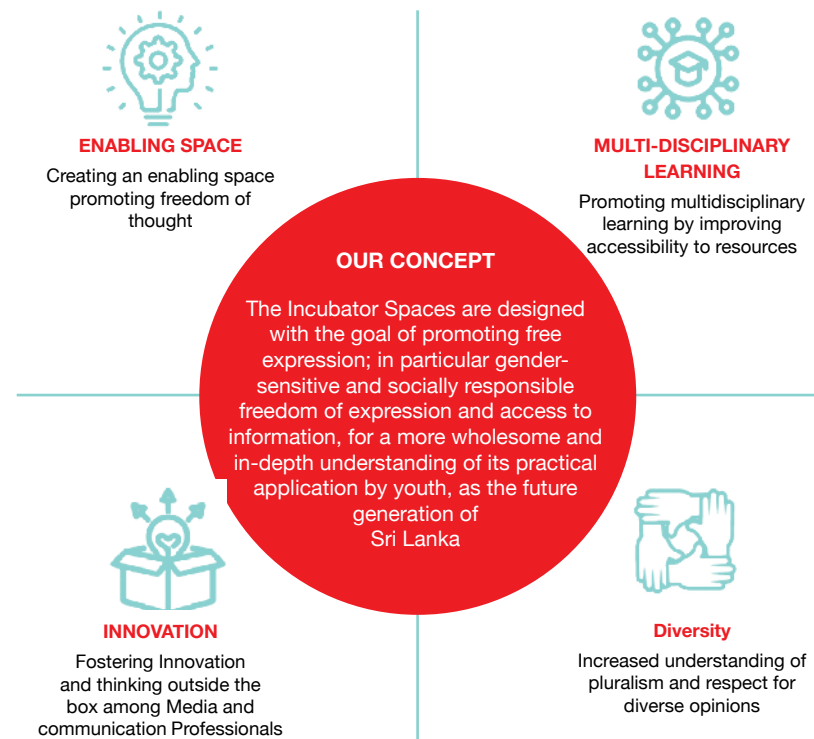


## Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication

Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication also known as Media Incubator Spaces have been developed to cater to the needs of media, and journalism professionals and students. It is an integrated learning space that provides opportunities to study and practice multiple disciplines/fields connected to media communication and journalism as well as engage in practical studies pertaining to media production. The space serves as a co-working space that bring together media, communication and journalism students to connect with peers, resource persons and media sector experts to enhance their knowledge, skills required for their professional growth.

These Incubator Spaces are specifically designed to foster free expression, access to information in an innovative manner to provide multi-disciplinary learning environment for the said professionals and students. This has been achieved through;

- 1) Provision of media equipment and other facilities such as studio, conference and co-working space to facilitate practical learning pertaining to media studies as well as creative media production.
- 2) Provision of capacity building training to enhance conceptual and practical skills to above mentioned media students to efficiently use the space for media production as well as multi-disciplinary learning.
- 3) Provision of opportunities to network and with media, and journalism students and sector professionals and peer learning.



## Why Incubator Spaces are important and why are they needed?

**Problem:** The lack of practical opportunities for learning and gaps in the availability of resources which have been identified as a key barrier to critical reasoning and the lack of enabling space for innovation and expression

**Reason:** An increased emphasis on traditional education systems and classroom-based learning

**Solution:** Diverging from conventional learning to integrated learning by designing a multidisciplinary learning space through direct consultations with students, to understand their educational and professional requirements, and develop a holistic learning experience conducive to growth

### Purpose of an Incubator Space for Media and Communication

1. To provide a non-conventional and progressive learning environment for media, communication and journalism students.
2. To facilitate access to resources such as media equipment and other facilities for students to engage in practical work relating to media and communication.
3. To provide a safe space for free expression and exchange of information.
4. To provide a platform for multi-disciplinary learning opportunities, peer learning collaboration and innovation.
5. To facilitate collaboration and networking between students, media, communication and journalism professionals and mentors to develop their analytical skills as well as personal and professional growth.

### Who can use these incubator Spaces?

The Incubator spaces for media and communication are designed to primarily accommodate the academic and professional requirements of aspiring media, communication and journalism students as well as academics. However, the spaces are not limited only to this group of students. It intends to provide opportunities to network and collaborate with media/journalism sector professionals and likeminded students and academics from other departments in the university.

## Key Facilities Provided under Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication

Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication are equipped with media-related equipment, conference facilities, a lounge area, co-working space and a broadcasting area. This will provide opportunities for students to access equipment and technical facilities to fine tune their practical skills in using media equipment and to learn about broadcasting, recording, filming and editing.



*Broadcasting Area*



*Lounge Area*



*Conference Facilities*



*Co-working Area*

### ***Spatial Features of an Incubator Space for Media and Communication***

## Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication: Benefits for Students

1. The Incubator Space will provide an alternative environment to traditional classroom learning.
2. The Incubator Space will provide a safe environment for the media, communication and journalism students to freely express themselves, share information and develop their ideas.
3. The Incubator Space will provide tools and in house facilities for students to practice their learnings under experienced resource persons and mentors, giving them the space to learn and grow thereby improving the quality of learning.
4. Multi-disciplinary learning opportunities and working spaces provided under the Incubator Space will bring together like-minded mass media, communication and journalism students to collaborate with resource persons, sector experts and peers to enhance their skills as media and communication professionals.
5. Students will gain technical skills and knowledge that will motivate them to communicate and collaborate with their peers as well as to contribute to the media sector and raise professional standards.



## Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication: Value Additions to Universities/Higher Education Institutions (HEI)

1. The respective university/HEI will be able to expand its resources and facilities, (especially for media and communication studies) through the resources provided under the Incubator Space.
2. The respective university/HEI will be able to access resources and new technologies through the in-house facilities provided under the Incubator Space.
3. The respective university/HEI will be able to provide an alternative learning environment to traditional classroom setting for its students through the incubator space.
4. The respective university/HEI will be able to provide required resources for students (especially for media and communication) to enhance their knowledge, critical thinking, analytical skills as well as practical skills thereby improving their quality of learning.
5. The Incubator Space will facilitate respective university/HEI to produce individuals equipped with knowledge and skills to meet the requirements of the media, and journalism sector and the job market.
6. The Incubator Space will facilitate respective university/HEI to promote innovation through producing new knowledge and findings.
7. The respective university/HEI will be promoted as a model university committed to multi-disciplinary learning through the incubator space.
8. The respective university/HEI will earn recognition as a progressive hub that is committed to free expression, information exchange and innovation through the incubator space.



## Establishing an Incubator Space for Media and Communication: Key Considerations

### 1. Identifying your target group

Incubator Spaces can vary from one another based on the need and the function of the space. Identifying your target group is the first step in designing the incubator space since they will be your key beneficiaries who will be using the space. Once the target group is identified, it is important to conduct a needs assessment to identify their needs and requirements that needs to be fulfilled through the space. At the same time this will shed light on the resources required for this space and to have a good understanding on what you intend to accomplish through this incubator space.

In the case of Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication established in Universities of Peradeniya, Sri Jayawardenepura and Jaffna:



**Main Target group:** Media, Communication and Journalism students

**Needs and requirements of the target group that need to be fulfilled:** relevant resources to develop practical skills, critical thinking, and creative thinking skills as well as networking skills.

**Intended goal to be accomplished through the Incubator Space:** provision of multi-disciplinary learning opportunities, skills development, professional growth and collaboration.

### 2. Building Partnerships

It is important to build partnerships when developing Incubator Spaces as it provides the basis for sound and understanding of the expectations and deliverables among the stakeholders involved. Through regular follow-ups and progress meetings, a strong relationship must be established between the stakeholders involved to establish an incubator spaces. Effective partnerships foster: good understanding, common vision and goals, mutual understanding among stakeholders, ownership, continued assistance throughout the lifecycle of the incubator space establishment and sustainability of the space.



### **3. Building Ownership**

When building an Incubator Space, continuous engagement with key target groups/ stakeholders who will be utilizing, operating and maintaining the space such as students, academics, administrative staff play an important role in building ownership. Some helpful strategies to build ownership among target groups/stakeholders are given below:

1. Make it a consultative process. This will provide room for participation and meaningful engagement of key target groups/ stakeholders during the process of establishing the Incubator Space.
2. Assign roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder during the process of establishment and maintenance.
3. Provide space and opportunities for key target groups/stakeholders to contribute their ideas to design, operationalize and maintain the space.

### **4. Identifying a Suitable Space**

Having a suitable space in line with the expectations of the Incubator Space is a priority. Prior to selecting a space, the purpose of establishing an incubator space should be well understood. Following are some questions to ask in order to identify an appropriate space for the incubator space to ensure optimum functionality:

1. What is the intended purpose of the space?
2. What are the activities which will be conducted inside the space?
3. How many people should the space accommodate?
4. Should the space be accessible/ closer to students from a specific department?
5. Does it provide a suitable environment conducive to learning, collaboration and exchange of ideas?
6. Does the space have sufficient ventilation, lighting sound resistance?

When the requirement and expectation of the space is identified the next stage is to identify the nature of the space required and to analyze the building conditions. If the building allocated for the incubator space is an existing building it is important to analyze the condition of the building. This will determine if any additional renovations are required if there are technical issues associated with the building (electrical, wiring, flooding, leakage, etc.) that will further assist in planning and managing costs.

## 5. Allocating Funds and Resources

Resource allocation and fund allocation for building an incubator space is important during the planning, establishing, operationalizing, and maintaining the incubator space. However, establishing an incubator space does not have to be financially demanding. Through identifying available resources within the university e.g., existing/ unused spaces, furniture and media equipment and innovating to include sustainable measures to build the space can help in using the existing resources efficiently. For instance, upcycling existing furniture, identifying talent among peers with an interest in design/ planning, using ideas, creativity and feedback from fellow peers can minimize certain expenditures and create a dynamic, inclusive space catering to the specific requirements of its key users. This will not only save costs but build ownership of the space as a byproduct.

Once an understanding is gained on the available resources and funds, it is important to come up with a budget allocating sufficient funds where necessary. A thorough understanding of budget allocations as well as setting aside allowances for contingencies is key in considering any unforeseen expenditures; this could be range from price hikes, poor building conditions unaccounted for (when working with an existing building), building aspects (partitions, doors), technical aspects, etc. Some of the requirements to keep in mind when allocating expenses include:

1. Furniture: tables, chairs, workstations
2. Electrical appliances: plug points, wiring
3. Media equipment for the space – cameras, mobile phones, tri-pods, green screens, head phones, audio-mixers
4. Renovations based on the condition of the building – Eg: painting, fixing lights, walls etc
5. Contractor fees
6. Contingencies – allocation for any unforeseen expenses
7. Interior designer fees (optional)







## Operationalizing of Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication: Key Considerations

Once the Incubator Space is established, it is pivotal for the space to be operationalized in a systematic manner to efficiently make use of its resources to achieve its full potential.

Key steps to operationalize Incubator Spaces for media and communication based on the experience and learnings from InSPIRE project are given below:

1. Appointing a focal point representing the University/HOE to oversee the overall functions of the incubator space.
2. Allocating dedicate technical officer/s with knowledge on operating/maintaining media equipment for the space.
3. Developing appropriate standards of operations, procedures, general house keeping rules and operational times for the users of incubator space.
4. Developing a weekly/monthly/annual activity plan in collaboration with students and academics to utilize the incubator space.
5. Maintaining a user logbook to keep track of activity.
6. Maintaining an efficient filing system for documentation including inventory lists, user guides.
7. Conducting orientations to students and academics to educate them on the purpose and functions of incubator space, general housekeeping rules, care for premises and equipment.
8. Training media and communication students on how to use media equipment during the orientation programmes conducted on the incubator space.

## Sustainability of Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication

The sustainability of incubator spaces remains a key priority to ensure its effective use and to promote it as a replicable model.

### Why do Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication need to be sustained?

1. Incubator spaces function as progressive spaces that facilitate multi-disciplinary learning and exchange. Thus, enabling students to hone their critical and analytical skills.
2. Incubator spaces promote new innovative ideas and improve creativity among aspiring media and communication students that would translate to dynamic and active media presence in the country.
3. Incubator spaces are equipped with facilities for student to develop practical skills in media production, journalism, and communication . Thus, creating media professionals equipped with conceptual knowledge and practical skills to meet the demands of the job market in the sector.
4. Students will have the advantage of kick starting their careers in the real word with the practical exposure gained through the Incubator Space
5. Incubator Spaces elevate universities as hubs for progressive learning for students and are a value addition to the university.

### Recommendations to Ensure Sustainability of Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication

1. Develop a comprehensive operational plan to manage the incubator space, its physical resources and capacity development.
2. Prepare an annual budget covering expenses to maintain the space and negotiate with the management/administration for fund allocation.
3. Appoint a committee or a core group consisting of academic, non-academic staff members and student representatives to advice, manage and monitor functions and activities of the space.
4. Implement a system to book the incubator space and its equipment for activities. Eg: logbook, online booking system implemented by the Incubator Space at University of Peradeniya.

5. Conduct periodic orientations to sensitize media and communication students on the functions and effective usage of incubator space for (Especially for the new batches).
5. Appoint qualified staff members with technical skills to manage and oversee the space.
6. Adopt incubator spaces as an integrated learning approach for higher education students pursuing media and communication studies.
7. Increase networking with media sector experts, likeminded universities and organizations supporting free expression, media freedom and innovation to access resources, training and funding to sustain incubator spaces.
8. Support the organic growth of student led media societies to take up an active role in maintaining and sustaining incubator spaces.
9. Utilize incubator space as a broadcasting space for web-radio/ YouTube channel for media students.
10. Incorporate Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication as a physical resource in the relevant department of the university/HEI for conducting academic programmes.
11. Reach out to corporate organizations, donors, alumni associations and well-wishers to obtain assistance (financial/technical) to maintain and sustain the incubator space.

## About The InSPIRE Project

The “*Incubator Space for Promoting Information Right and Freedom of Expression*” (InSPIRE) is a project focussed on promoting freedom of expression and right to information in a socially responsible and a gender sensitive manner, in order to contribute to the enhancement of democracy and human rights in Sri Lanka. This project is implemented by HELVETAS Intercooperation gGmbH Sri Lanka (HELVETAS) in partnership with Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) with financial assistance from the European Union (EU).

The InSPIRE project aspires to empower a community of aspiring young journalists as well as media and communication professionals through:

- Establishing Incubator Spaces for Media and Communication to promote multi-disciplinary learning, free expression, information exchange and innovation in three universities: University of Jaffna, University of Peradeniya and University of Sri Jayawardenepura.
- Building capacity through: 1)specialized trainings to develop knowledge on freedom of expression, right to information, digital citizenship, gender in new media; 2) practical skills development pertaining to media production.
- Providing opportunities for the same youth to develop creative media products to raise awareness on socio-economical and political issues in the country.

Thereby mobilizing them as an amplifier to advocate for freedom of expression, right to information in an ethical, socially responsible and gender sensitive manner.

This project is implemented in four national universities representing four diverse districts in Sri Lanka namely:

1. **University of Sri Jayawardenepura** - Department of Sinhala and Mass communication (Colombo district)
2. **University of Peradeniya** - Department of Agriculture Extension (Kandy district)
3. **University of Jaffna** - Department of Media Studies (Jaffna district)
4. **South-Eastern University** - Faculty of Arts and Culture (Batticaloa).

## **ABOUT OUR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS**

### **HELVETAS Intercooperation gGmbH Sri Lanka**

HELVETAS is an independent development organization founded in 1955, with its head office in Switzerland, and affiliated offices in Germany and United States and has a presence in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe. Its vision is a just world in which all men and women determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner. HELVETAS thematic working fields includes, Sustainable and Inclusive Economies, Governance and Peace, Water and Infrastructure, Environment and Climate Change and Skills Development and Education. HELVETAS strives to forge synergies between our projects, foster innovation and build the necessary capacities in a targeted manner. HELVETAS has been working in Sri Lanka for over four decades contributing to sustainable development in the country. Over the last two decades HELVETAS Sri Lanka's interventions have focused on peacebuilding, human rights, reconciliations through supporting civil society and state actors working with communities and youth from different ethno-religious backgrounds for changing attitudes and working towards co-existence, cultural diversity and dealing with conflict.

### **Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF)**

Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum (SDJF) was established in 2009 to provide space for the voiceless in marginalized communities through innovative community media tools using Development principles. SDJF is a not-for-profit organization that is well- established at the national level organization and registered under National NGO Secretariat with extensive experience in promoting the role of media in democratization and transformation. The organization works closely with local media organizations, international media development agencies, civil society organizations, institutes of higher education, youth and women development movements and other organizations that promote democracy and pluralism towards better transformation.

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