

ENGLISH TRANSCRIPT OF FRONTIER DIALOGUES PODCAST EPISODE 3: THAANA MALLOW WITH FAATHUN

SUMMARY

This week on Frontier Dialogues - we have with us, Fathimath Ibrahim (Faathun) on behalf of the Thaana Mellow team, winners of Miyaheli 2019. Faathun currently works at Maldives Tourism Development Corporation but she's better known for her volunteer work in multiple NGOs such as the Blind and Visually Impaired Society and Maldives Red Crescent. She is a true inspiration to all, with her endless efforts to challenge societal expectations and show that Persons with Disabilities too can do anything they set their mind to.

Similar was the mindset of team Thaana Mellow constituting members from the Blind and Visually Impaired community of Maldives who set out to illustrate what they can do when given an opportunity to move forward. Miyaheli 2019 which ensured inclusivity and accessibility to all, provided the team members and avenue to initiate dialogue and interact with large groups of people.

As Fathun describes it, the social innovation camp also was an opportunity to show their talents and build self-confidence. It was a remarkable experience made even more unforgettable with the recent release of the Thaana Mellow application, a product of the winning idea of Miyaheli 2019. Thaana Mellow is a screen reading application which converts Thaana (written script of Maldivian language *Dhivehi*) to Latin Dhivehi which then reads the text out loud. The app aims to address the gap in access to Dhivehi information sources.

Reflecting on her own experience, Faathun emphasized the increased need and significance of such an app especially during the current health crisis which keeps evolving constantly. Previously, Blind and Visually impaired community had no access to any localized information shared in Dhivehi by the government and health experts. However, today Thaana Mellow app has changed this reality and managed to overcome another barrier.

Fathun's podcast can be accessed at:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-539321192/fathun>

Fathimath Ibrahim (FI), was interviewed for the podcast by Naufal Amjad (NA)

NA: Assalam Alaikum Fathun! How are you?

FI: I am good. How are you?

NA: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to interview you. Please briefly introduce yourself.

FI: My name is Fathimath Ibrahim, and am currently working at Maldives Tourism Development Corporation as a Customer Relations Officer. I also volunteer at many NGOS but most people know my work with Blind and Visually Impaired Society and Maldives Red Crescent. I also take part in activities such as running with the objective to emphasize that Persons with Disabilities too can do anything they set their mind to.

NA: Tell us about your experience participating in Miyaheli?

FI: It was a very good opportunity. My team, Thaana Mellow wanted to show that even people with visual impairments can participate in such initiatives and succeed in them. I think we were able to show this very well. It was also a good opportunity to interact and present to a large group. Miyaheli camp gave us a platform to show our talent while improving our self-confidence.

NA: How do you feel about the entire Miyaheli experience?

FI: Miyaheli was designed and shaped such that everyone can participate. For instance, all facilitators did real-time Dhivehi translations keeping in mind that everyone might not be well-versed in English.

NA: Can you tell us a little about the app and why you think it's important?

FI: If I am to give a brief introduction of Thaana Mellow, I would say it's a screen reader which turns Thaana to Dhivehi Latin and reads it out loud in Dhivehi. It targets the blind community because till now information written in Dhivehi weren't accessible to us, people with visual impairments. Other foreign applications are able to help with English, but this application attempts to overcome the barrier that exists with respect to Dhivehi sources. We believe, that everyone should be able to access all news and local websites. Thaana Mellow, is a good application built to cater to all these concerns.

NA: We are currently facing COVID-19, a global pandemic. How do you think this app would be able to help the blind community during such challenging times?

FI: I believe this will be extremely helpful. As someone who has experienced this firsthand, prior to this we did not have access to any information or news in Dhivehi. However with this application, we are finally able to. A lot of the information and latest updates on COVID19 is shared mostly in Dhivehi making it difficult for us to access it. Someone has to share this information through voice notes with us. However, today we can happily use this app and directly read and access the relevant information. Hence, undoubtedly this application is very useful and relevant in the current context.

NA: Thank you Fathun, for your continued work and also for this application. Thank you for joining us today.

FI: Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity.

