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INTRODUCTION

Arts and Disability is a key area of work for the British Council arts. In the context of the UK, and Europe, the area is being explored extensively primarily due to the presence of expertise and the interest of art organisations of the artistic and aesthetic challenges that disabled artists bring forth. There are artists, experts and organisations in the UK who are focused on making art accessible and inclusive and their expertise can prove invaluable not just in Europe but also in other parts of the world, and especially in South Asia where disability, traditionally, has been stigmatised and looked down upon.

Work in South Asia had started a few years before, and major projects in [Bangladesh](#), [India](#), [Pakistan](#) and [Sri Lanka](#) have been executed. As part of this regional effort—that Bangladesh is taking the lead on—work in Nepal commenced from March 2018, with the organising of a theatre and disability workshop—facilitated by UK theatre company [Birds of Paradise](#)—at the British Council premises and through the partnership between the organisation and Nepal International Theatre Festival. Four disabled and non-disabled individuals have been given small grants to create projects, this year, which will be focused on the theme of “Nothing about us without us.”



Mairi Taylor with workshop participants during a brainstorming exercise at the British Council in Kathmandu.
PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL

PARTNERSHIP WITH NITFEST

- The British Council supported Nepal International Theatre Festival as the Strategic Partner for the 2019 edition—25 February to 4 March
- The British Council awarded the festival NPR 200,000 as inclusivity grant
- As part of the partnership, a panel discussion on Arts and Disability, 50% subsidy in tickets for disabled visitors, two plays with sign language interpretation were realised. A dedicated webpage detailing [accessibility initiatives of the festival](#) was also set up in the festival website.
- The partnership also led to the partnership with National Federation of the Deaf. The organisation helped promote the festival through their social media. Here is a [link to the video](#) created for NITFEST.

About Nepal International Theatre Festival

- Seven theatre companies from Nepal came together to organised Nepal International Theatre Festival (NITFEST)
- The festival was themed “Theatre for Social Transformation” and staged works that address issues surrounding communal harmony, social diversity and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The central idea behind organising the event is to address the various socio-political issues surrounding the world through awareness, art and exchange.
- The festival featured performances from nine different countries from around the world
- Thirty plays were staged alongside art performances and a number of workshops, discussions, and open-air performances.



NSL interpreter Sagar Subedi at work during Actor's Studio's opening day performance. PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL

Panel Discussion

Talk brief

Disability is a topic that has been talked about in Nepali theatre, but unfortunately, while plays around disability issues have been produced in the past, almost none of them actually involved disabled people in production. Also, during pre-production, there are hardly and disabled characters that are developed for stage. The ones that are are created by non-disabled people and are often portrayed to symbolise weakness, for sympathy or for comic relief. The panel discussion brought together an artist, a producer and a disability organisation professional to talk about how hands on inclusivity could be brought about in Nepali theatre and how it could be made more accessible to disabled people.

[Theatre and Disability](#) | March 03, 2019 | Junkiri Theatre Bus), Mandala Theatre

Panelists: [Dayahang Rai](#) (film actor), [Mairi Taylor](#) (BOP), [Manish Prasai](#) (National Federation of the Disabled Nepal)

Moderator: [Sagar Prasain](#)

Attendance: 43



From left: Sagar Prasain, Nhooja Tuladhar, Mairi Taylor, Manish Prasai and Dayahang Rai.
PHOTO: NITFEST

Panel Discussion

- Sign languages interpreters were interpreting the talk real-time through which were benefiting 12 deaf participants in the audience.
- All panelists agreed on the importance of bringing disability issues into mainstream theatre for greater awareness
- The dire need to make physical infrastructure more accessible. There are no theatre halls in Nepal that are wheelchair accessible, for example.
- The importance of disabled people to be involved in production, especially in ones that involve disability as a topic or have disabled characters.



Sign language interpreters during the panel discussion.
PHOTO: NITFEST

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

- Sign language interpreters were assigned to interpret the opening/closing ceremonies of the festival as well as to interpret two Nepal plays—Gainda Times and Jokhana—performed during the festival. A dedicated tour bus was rented for deaf audiences to travel to Gainda Times' staging, which was held in Kirtipur, the Kathmandu Valley's fourth city.
- The organisers of the festival approached a number of Nepali plays for sign language addition, but most were unsure of the aesthetic impact having interpreters on stage would make. Sijan Dahal, the director of Gainda Times was keen on experimenting with this. The play was the only one that featured a disabled artist in the cast.
- The interpreters practiced during one dress rehearsal prior to the main performance.
- The interpreters said that working on a play was a very new experience for them as they had only interpreted meetings, and events in the past.
- One interpreter said that the job was challenging at times because the dialogues would be spoken fast and they would not be able to catch up. This meant that the deaf audience would miss out on some of the details. This issue came about because the plays were not designed with sign language interpretation in mind. The best approach would be to think about this during the scripting and the initial rehearsing process



A sign language interpreter on stage with the performers of Gainda Times.
PHOTO: NITFEST

WORKSHOP: Exploring Approaches to Access and Inclusion - New Ways of Working

Dates: 5 to 9 March, 2019
1000 hrs to 1300 hrs.

Venue: British Council, Kathmandu

In March, Glasgow-based theatre company **Birds of Paradise** was invited to Kathmandu to facilitate a five-day workshop for young disabled leaders, professionals from disability organisations and theatre professionals.

The workshop focused on disability equality and inclusivity wherein the facilitators talked to the participants regarding how BOP makes use of creative access and collaborative working in theatre production.

BOP also mentored the participants to develop project ideas through which four individual participants have received micro grants, outputs of which will be produced by September, 2019.



Participants discuss project ideas in a group.
PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL

WORKSHOP

A total of 26 participants took part in the workshop.

Among them were:

- 14 disabled people — including artists with disabilities
- 8 art professionals and representatives from art organisations
- 4 representatives from disability organisations

Motivational speaker and disability rights activist, Sagar Prasai was brought into the workshop organising team as coordinator and advisor. This was the first time that the British Council Arts in Nepal brought in a disabled person into the working team of a project.

Two sign language interpreters, Sagar Subedi and Dinesh Shrestha were present throughout the workshop to help deaf participants understand the conversations that took place during the workshop.

Late theatre/film artist Hemanta Chalise was hired as the English-Nepali-English interpreter for language interpretation services. A theatre artist was called in for the job so that jargons from theatre and the performing arts could easily be translated.

*Please contact Arts@britishcouncil.org.np for further information on the workshop.



From left: Dinesh Shrestha, Mairi Taylor, Michelle Rolfe, Hemanta Chalise, Sagar Subedi and Sagar Prasain. PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL

BIRDS OF PARADISE

Birds of Paradise Theatre was formally constituted as a company limited by guarantee and as a registered charity in 1993, becoming Scotland's first touring theatre company employing disabled and non-disabled actors. Since then we have been led by a number of visionary leaders and in 2012 we became disability-led through the appointment of our current Artistic Directors.

Many original aims behind the formation of the company are still familiar to Birds of Paradise today: to employ disabled and non-disabled actors and other theatre professionals, to commission new work, to work in partnership with other organisations at home and abroad, to create positive images of inclusion and to encourage participation in the arts.

Mairi Taylor (Executive Producer), Michelle Rolfe (Producer) and Callum Madge (Engagement Manager) from the theatre company facilitated the workshop.



Michelle Rolfe and Mairi Taylor with the women participants.
PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL

FEEDBACK

The collection of feedbacks from the participants revealed a few major points:

- 86% said that the workshop met their expectation.
- 77% said it was a high quality programme.
- 84% said they acquired new knowledge/skill through the workshop
- Participants said that being able to meet and connect with people from different fields was the highlight of the workshop.
- The implementation of sign language along with language interpretation was very interesting and most thought it was very important.
- Some participants said they were inspired to start doing research on how working with disabled artists and professionals can be continued.
- Participating artists said that the newly-gained knowledge regarding disability will be important for them in their lives and work.
- To collaborate is interesting and important.
- Some said they were inspired to create theatre productions.
- Theatre professionals said they would be interested in a more advanced workshop in the future which could give them hands-on information regarding working with disabled people.

GRANTS

To encourage theatre artists, disabled people and disability organisations to further pursue work in the arts, an open call for proposal was announced. Out of nine entries, four were awarded with NPR 300,000 micro grants to initiate work in the theatre arts with the direct involvement of disabled people.

Birds of Paradise, during the workshop, helped the participants to structure their project ideas after which the proposals were reviewed by the theatre company along with British Council staff.

The four grantees are [KP Adhikari](#), [Raji Manjari Pokharel](#), [Sudam CK](#) and [Sundari Mishra](#).

Outputs of the projects is in plans to be performed/shown later this year. The outputs will be in the form of two play productions, four focus groups and workshops and two video podcast episodes.



KP Adhikari

- KP Adhikari, the President of National Federation of the Deaf Nepal, participated in the workshop and proposed to produce a play involving theatre professionals and deaf people.
- The first draft of the script—written by Nar Bahadur BC—has been completed and the team is now looking to finalise the cast for the drama
- NFDN will also be doing a workshop with their cast on acting and the basics of theatre production. For this, they are collaborating with Sudam CK of Katha Ghera Theatre, a fellow grantee.
- The script will be finalised by the end of June and rehearsal will commence right after.
- Synopsis of the play: Basudev, a rural business man's child is born deaf and his family and friends consult a shaman to “cure” the child of this ailment. A young deaf person who is an educator travels to Basudev's village with the aim of establishing a school for the deaf.



KP Adhikari (right) with Jokhana director and actors. British Council's initiative was able to bring together NITFEST and NFDN for a partnership.

PHOTO: NITFEST

RAJI MANJARI POKHAREL

- Workshop participant Raji Manjari Pokharel is a mental health councillor and is the co-producer of Utar Chadav, a podcast that focuses on mental health issues.
- She will be utilising the grant to produce two episodes of the podcast as disability special editions.
- The first episode will engage deaf people from NFDN and will deal with issues of depression, anxiety and addiction.
- The podcast will be a video where there will be sign language interpretation, which will make the content accessible to the deaf community.
- On 29 May, a focus group discussion was organised at the British council involving seven deaf individuals and two NSL interpreters to get suggestions as to how the podcast could be produced and made more efficient and effective.
- The deaf individuals have suggested to release the video at the Deaf School in Kathmandu and do a Q&A session with the students.
- The groups is meeting again to finalise the plan for the podcast and to shoot a dummy version of the podcast.



Focus group participants podcast filming ideas.
PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL

SUDAM CK

- Sudam CK is affiliated with women led theatre company Katha Ghera who's portfolio includes productions like Vagina Monologues, Private is Political and Paanch.
- Katha Ghera is the only theatre group in Nepal who employ playback theatre as a form of performance.
- As part of the grant project, Sudam is working with his team to organise two playback theatre performances for disabled people.
- The first performance is being held in Spinalcord Rehabilitation Centre on 16 June.
- The second playback show is being planned at the Children and Disability Hospital where the group will be working with children.
- CK is also organising a week-long basic theatre workshop for disabled people. For this, he will be working with deaf participants from NFDN. This will be a collaboration between grantees CK and Adhikari.
- CK hopes to produce a short skit from the basic theatre workshop.



Katha Ghera team during a playback session. During playback sessions, the performers converse with the audience on a personal, individual level to create improvised performances inspired by the audience's story.

PHOTO: KATHA GHERA

SUNDARI MISHRA

- Sundari Mishra of Creative Little Women Society for her project is bringing together people who have different disabilities to produce a series of monologues that will be performed on stage.
- She is working with a group of at least 6 people who are visually impaired, little, paraplegic and deaf.
- The monologues that will be performed will be based on real life stories of the members of the group, which has been shared during a two-week workshop that has already been completed.
- Rehearsal for the performance is scheduled to begin from July.
- Theatre artists Praladh Kharel and Loonibha Tuladhar (who is a British Council past beneficiary) have been facilitating workshops for the group.
- Sundari Mishra is planning to organise a ticketed show later this year of the performance as raise funds for housing her organisation is building for little people.



Sundari Mishra (centre) doing an improvised act with fellow participant during a workshop sessions. PHOTO: BRITISH COUNCIL



This report has been produced by the British Council's arts team in Nepal.
2019

Video documentation of NITFEST and the workshop is currently under production.
The media will be embedded in the British Council website along with Birds of Paradise's evaluation report.

For more details and updates on the British Council's work in Arts and Disability, please contact:

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