

Danish Culture and Development Strategy for Nepal 2007-2010

1. Introduction

The Embassy of Denmark in Kathmandu has developed this strategy – “Danish Culture and Development Strategy for Nepal 2007 – 2010” - with assistance from the Danish Center for Culture and Development (DCCD). During a fact-finding mission in May 2007, a team from DCCD had discussions with Embassy programme staff and with a number of selected counterparts. At the end of the mission, an options paper was produced outlining concrete project ideas. Based on the present strategy, those projects will be further elaborated by the respective partners.

2. Background

The Danish Strategy for Culture and Development from 2002 sets the overall priorities and guidelines for the work with culture. The strategy outlines three lines of cultural support: 1) Promotion and mainstreaming of the cultural dimension in development programmes, 2) Arts and culture as a tool for development communication to achieve development objectives, and 3) Direct support to culture as an integrated part of development, e.g. in terms of pluralism, peace building, empowerment and creative industries. The strategy applies a broad understanding of culture covering not only as arts and letters but also socio-anthropological factors.

1.2. The Nepali context

Nepal is the poorest country in South Asia with a GDP per capita of 269 US dollars (2004). The total population of 25,4 million people (2006) contains at least 56 ethnic groups¹ and an indigenous population of about 40%, which do not have Nepali as their mother language. In total, there are 20 major languages in Nepal. This is combined with a caste system containing 4 major castes, of which the Brahmins are the dominant group. The Dalits form a caste-less group at the bottom of the society mainly comprising unskilled – or in some cases – even bonded labourers. Hinduism is the official religion (covering 86% of the population according to state estimates), which is followed by Buddhism and Islam. Many independent experts, however, claim that the estimate of the Hindu population is too high, as traditional religions (such as Bon) have been included in this category. Nepal has not ratified the ILO convention 169 on indigenous people.

The patriarchal system in Nepal has resulted in widespread discrimination against women. Women traditionally take care of the household and have fewer opportunities than men for participation in public life. At the same time, school enrolment and literacy rates are significantly higher for males, limiting women’s access to skilled and well-paid jobs. Women’s representation in politics is only about 5%, one of the lowest rates in Asia. On top of this comes the special discrimination against widows (explained below) and the heritage practices according to which only the son can inherit from the parents.

One of the most discernible trends in the Nepali society is the cultural transformation in terms of internationalisation, modernisation and unification created by forces of globalisation, “nepalization” (one country, one language) and “sanskritization” (promotion of the Brahmin culture). This has put

¹ As registered members of the National Foundation for Development Indigenous nationalities (NFDIN)

pressure on the ethnic cultures and threatened their survival, and it has created a growing loss of and search for identity. Many Nepalese artists have started to search for inspiration from their cultural roots and traditions in a time when the country risks losing its rich immaterial cultural heritage. Nepal has not ratified the recent UNESCO convention on cultural diversity.

In November 2006, the government signed a peace accord with the Maoist rebels declaring a formal end to a 10-year rebel insurgency. Under the deal, the rebels will join a transitional government and their weapons will be under UN monitoring. Since then, the situation has stabilised and it has recently been announced that the elections for the Constituent Assembly will take place on 22 November 2007. One of the main topics related to these elections has been the design of an all-inclusive democratic system. Social inclusion is one of today's major issues. The inclusive, participatory and proportionate representation of indigenous nationalities, Dalits, Madhesis, marginalized communities and women in all decision-making processes are seen to be the only acceptable precursor to peace.

2.2. Danish assistance to Nepal

Nepal has been a Danish program country since 1989. The current principles for Danish Development Assistance to Nepal are laid out in interim strategy for 2006-2007, as process of formulation a long-term strategy was suspended following the King's assumption of power. The main objectives of the interim strategy are to promote a democratic political environment based on respect for human rights and to contribute to poverty reduction in a peace – and conflict- sensitive manner. The main sector/thematic programme areas are: Education, Human Rights and Good Governance (HUGOU) and Energy.

Direct support to cultural projects from the Embassy of Denmark has been provided through the Local Grant Authority (LGA). The major events over the recent years have been the so-called “peace concerts”, which LGA has supported on several occasions. Some support to cultural sector in Nepal is also provided by the Danish NGO “MS”, for example in the field of forum theatre around democratic issues and empowerment of orphans. Finally, DCCD has supported a number of cultural exchange projects with Nepal. This includes projects in children's literature, joint theatre productions and traditional/religious dance.

3. Overall Objectives

Through support to arts productions at the civil society level:

- *To promote peace-building and reconciliation in Nepal*
- *To strive for an open and plural society with respect for cultural diversity*
- *To strengthen empowerment of vulnerable groups through active participation in arts*
- *To promote intercultural collaboration, dialogue and understanding between Denmark and Nepal*

4. Implementation strategy

The main element in the Danish support to culture in Nepal is a *culture programme* containing exchange projects between Denmark and Nepal as well as relevant local initiatives in Nepal. Partners from Nepal and Denmark will implement these projects. Besides the cultural programme, the strategy also includes proposals for strengthening of the *cultural dimension of the thematic/sector programmes* like Human Rights/Good Governance and Education.

4.A. Culture programme - Exchange projects

Support will be directed at longer-term partnership projects between Nepali and Danish culture organisations that contain a series of exchange activities. Preference is given to projects that are innovative, have an artistic quality and contributes to development objectives in Nepal such peace building, capacity development and freedom of expression. When relevant, the project may also include activities in Denmark that aim at creating more diverse images of Nepal among the Danish population.

During the fact-finding mission, a number of project ideas have been identified, which are going to be further developed by the respective partners:

Children's literature

Children's literature contributes to the stimulate children's imagination, perception, reasoning, judgment and critical sense. It is thus a support to children's cognitive and intellectual development as creative and democratic citizens. Today, there is an emerging Nepali children's literature, but the content is not of high quality. The stories are often traditional fables providing simple amusement and/or books serving didactical or moralising purposes. This is merely the author talking to the child reader than an eye-to-eye story that opens for interpretation and reflection. Illustrations are technically fine, but less exciting or challenging for the children, as they often do not add content and meaning to the text.

Denmark has a very strong tradition in children's literature and illustrated books for children. As part of a previous project, the Danish Writers Association (DWA) has already carried out some training activities for Nepali authors and illustrators and they have established a partnership with Nepalese Society for Children's literature (NESCHIL) and the international NGO "Room to Read" in Nepal. Room to Read has specialised in setting up school libraries, including training of teacher librarians, provision of books and library activities for the pupils aiming to promote a reading culture.

The aim of the project is to develop the capacity of a group of Nepali authors and illustrators and editors of children's books through exchanges and workshops with DWA. Following the workshops, a number of quality books will be produced and distributed through the Room to Read system. Linked to the distribution of the new books to school libraries, DWA and NESCHIL will organise a "children's book promotion tour" in which Danish and Nepali authors will participate. This will include a range of reading promotion activities in the local communities. DWA will also work with Himal Association, which has specialised in promotion and distribution of children's books through the private market.

Popular theatre production

Theatre in its various forms – street theatre, forum theatre, stage theatre, political theatre, stand ups etc. - is widely recognised as an important artistic means of raising relevant social issues, conflicts and taboos to generate reflection and debate. It can give voice to the voiceless and the oppressed and also form an effective tool for awareness raising and conflict resolution. Nepal has a tradition of combining more modern theatre forms with a strong social commitment. The plays are often "issue-based" in the sense that the deal with basic issues from the communities (land disputes, dowry, generation/gender roles, etc) and often reflect the traditional values in the Hindu religion. In some cases, however, the plays contain direct messages about what is right and wrong that correspond with the general feeling of the society.

The project is based on a partnership between Passepartout Theatre Production (PTP) from Denmark and Aarohan theatre in Nepal. PTP has specialised in theatre plays with an inter-cultural content as well as supporting theatre development in developing countries. Aarohan theatre is one of the most prominent independent theatres in Nepal. It stages its own productions, provide training for local theatre groups to set up forum theatre and street theatre and runs the “Gurukul” theatre school, which is in the process of being internationally accredited as a theatre collage. Most theatre groups in Nepal pass through Aarohan for training purposes in their career development.

The aim of the project is to stimulate contemporary theatre in Nepal that has an open and reflective content. It will set up a popular theatre production that is based on a universal fairy tale or classical story from the region. An entertaining play that has a strong appeal to a wider audience and contains human and or social dilemmas and issues that are relevant in the present Nepal. The play will tour Nepal, involve local actors, and be combined with public discussions on the key topics. It will also be staged at theatres in Denmark. Linked with the performance are training sessions for the performers and trainers at Aarohan on new techniques such as body movements, mime and clowns. It is expected that there will be co-funding from The Norwegian Embassy in Nepal.

Dance performance with orphans

Besides being a highly aesthetic piece of art that touches the feelings rather than the intellect of the participants, dance also has a physical dimension. Dance training builds up physical fitness and health and thereby well-being and self-confidence. In that way it can be an important means of empowerment and physical expression for marginalized groups, which may not have a strong vocabulary and/or ability to speak out. Key development topics may also be addressed through dance topics such as the women rights and the red colour movement to support widows, which has taken place in Nepal.

The project is based on a partnership between the Nepali dance troupe “Kala Mandapa” and Randi Patterson Company. The artistic base of Kala Mandapa are the traditional dance forms incorporating Hindu Buddhist epics, from which it also develops more contemporary performances. Kala Mandapa performs regularly in Kathmandu and it is also known outside the borders of Nepal. It organises training visits for students from foreign dance academies and it has performed in Europe (including Denmark) on a number of occasions. Part of this took place in a partnership with Randi Patterson Company, which is one of the pioneers of Danish contemporary dance.

Kala Mandapa and Randi Patterson Company have developed a project that target orphans and other vulnerable groups. It aims at stimulating their creativity, physical and mental well-being and also discipline and concentration through dance and music. The intention is to have a one-year basic training schedule carried out by Kala Mandapa after which a group of children will be selected for more intensive training over one year. The training will conclude in a performance, which will tour Nepal. Besides the direct empowerment of the children involved, it will also send a signal to the Nepal society that orphans have resources, courage and talent.

Visual art/Caricatures

Contemporary visual art, caricatures and cartoons can play a key role in democratic development as a way of promoting free expressions, freedom of the press and creating more open societies with room for critique of the authorities. Caricatures are emerging in Nepali newspapers and one of the

best cartoonists has recently published a book. Yet, the quality is still not so strong as in Europe or some countries in southern Africa.

In Nepal, one of the most important actors in the field of visual art is Gallery Nine. Launched in 2003, the Gallery has showcased some of the most exciting artists from Nepal. The gallery has previously carried out a small exhibition on caricatures. At the moment, Gallery Nine conducts an exhibition called “The Cow in the Nepali Imagination” which aims at creating a debate on the (dominant) role of Hinduism as well as the need for mutual respect for other religions and secularisation of the society. The project is based on a partnership with the Danish Union of Journalists as well as the Danish NGO “MS”. MS has worked successfully with caricatures in Uganda and is currently planning to involve resource persons from Uganda in training sessions for Nepali cartoonists from local newspapers and magazines. Their aim is to produce a book with caricatures, which will be used for human rights awareness raising in rural areas.

The aim of the project is stimulate the use – and quality – of caricatures and satirical drawings with a social and/or political touch in the Nepali media. The role of the present project will be to involve Danish cartoonists in the training sessions organised by MS, as Denmark has a strong tradition in the field. At the same time, the project will include an exhibition of the caricatures produced through the workshops at Gallery Nine. The exhibition will be shown in Kathmandu and some of the major towns. This would create a higher interest among the media in Nepal about give the caricatures – and the issues they reflect - and bring in an intra-cultural dimension of how cartoonists from Nepal, Denmark and Uganda portray the political and social situation in Nepal.

Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF)

KIMFF is organised by the Himal Association. Through this festival, which has been running on a biannual basis since year 2000, interest for the film media has been increasing in Nepal and the festival is slowly gaining international recognition. Last year approximately 20.000 people participated in the festival, which included 75 screenings over 5 days. The key words for the festival are to educate, entertain and inform. KIMFF has also had a very positive spin off effect on local production of documentary films in Nepal. There is a growth of independent film-makers operating on a low cost basis to portray issues of social, human and/or rights relevance.

From this year, Himal Association is going to implement the festival on a yearly basis. The next festival will be on in December 2007 and Himal Association is currently approaching potential sponsors – including the Danish Embassy – to secure the funding for the festival. As Denmark has a very strong trademark in film - dogme, children’s film, documentaries, fiction film with a strong social content – it is considered to not only to support the festival financially but also with screening of Danish films. The partners on the Danish side would be DCCD and the Danish Arts Council. DCCD has recently organised a Danish film festival in Belarus for Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The aim of the project is to stimulate the independent film industry in Nepal and to introduce the Nepali public to some of the best Danish films that bring up social issues. The intention is to have a “Danish Film Day” in connection with the festival. Films will be translated into Nepali. Resource persons from Denmark will introduce the films and inform about the film sector in Denmark. It has also been discussed with Himal Association to link this with a mini/film festival outside Kathmandu to reach not only a wider audience, but also an audience that rarely get the opportunities to see international quality film in their own language.

4.B. Culture programme - Local initiatives

Priority is given to competent partners, which are capable of addressing key issues in the Nepalese society related to empowerment of marginalized groups, peace building and promotion of human rights through innovative cultural means. At this stage, a range of interesting project ideas has been identified, but they still need to be worked on by the local partners. It is expected that the project proposals will be ready in September/October 2007. Based on a technical assessment of the projects – content, implementing partner, budget, etc – the Embassy of Denmark will decide which project to be supported through the culture programme. Thus, the main part of the local projects will be defined from the onset, but a budget amount will be reserved for new initiatives emerging over the course of the programme.

5. Thematic/Sector programmes

The approach of the fact-finding was to look at the experience and actual portfolio of the selected sector programmes to identify opportunities for a strengthening of the cultural dimension.

HUGOU

Due to the unstable political situation in Nepal, the HUGOU programme's support to peace-building activities and human rights sensitisation has been directed at civil society level. In this work, the partners apply a variety of cultural and media related tools for development communication. This includes the establishment of radio listener clubs, production and airing of radio programmes, publication and dissemination of peace bulletins, performance of traditional/ethnic songs, staging of street dramas, competitions with poems and essays, making of wall paintings and production of wall news papers. The HUGOU partners will conduct a synergy workshop in June 2007. If the need for capacity support to partners in theatre methods arises, it will be considered to use the Gurukul training facility. This may also be combined with the theatre exchange project described above.

As the present phase of HUGOU terminates in 2008, a review mission is planned for the end of this year/beginning of next year. There is a general agreement between the Danida Technical Advisory Services (TAS) unit and DCCD from a meeting in March 2007 to look for relevant opportunities to include cultural specialists on review and/or appraisal missions. Following the recent development at the overall political level, the next phase of the HUGOU programme will shift focus to channel more funds through the government agencies. Yet, it is expected that the programme will apply a balanced approach in which activities at civil society level still form an important role. It is therefore considered to include a culture/development communication specialist fielded by DCCD on the team.

Education

The educational sector programme contains cultural aspects along two dimensions. One is the focus on ethnic minorities and bilingual education and the needs to revise curriculum and develop teaching materials. The other is the vision of the programme to strengthen the content and the quality of education so that "all children learn to become democratic citizens" and the need for learning materials and libraries to "stimulate the innovative, creative and inquisitive minds of the children". Along the same lines it requires the teachers to "stimulate self-reflection and critical thinking" among the pupils.

This objective of creating democratic citizens corresponds very well with the intentions of the children's literature project. As the sector programme establishes school libraries and provides a

budget for the schools to purchase books, there are clear links to the children's literature project and its provision of quality books. As school management have been decentralised, such synergy effects will have to be further developed on the ground. One of the most important elements is to get the facts and fiction books from the exchange project into the classroom and make sure that the teachers use them effectively.

One option is that the children's books are used as supplementary books on a pilot basis. The key counterparts, the Ministry of Education and National Centre for Educational Development (NCED), confirm that the books may be used in Nepali Language and Social Studies. To achieve this, teachers will have to be trained and sensitised on the value and the use of the books. This will not happen through the exchange project. NCED carries out in-service courses for teachers and it has signalled an interest in applying a "Training of Trainers" approach in which the NCED facilitators of these in-service courses are trained - eventually with support from international consultants. Books from the exchange project should also be provided for its resource centres. NCED will consider forwarding an application to the steering committee in order to release funding from the educational programme for such a TOT programme.

6. Budget

The culture programme will initially cover a 3 year period with an expected budget of DKK 3,6 million, of which the Embassy of Denmark will contribute 3 million through the Local Grant Authority (LGA). Of the Embassy's budget, DKK 1.3 million will be earmarked for exchange projects, DKK 1.3 million will be for local projects and DKK 0.4 million will be for technical support, administration, monitoring and evaluation of the culture programme. The DCCD support of DKK 0.6 million will be earmarked for the exchange projects.

Activities linked to the sector programmes will be covered by funding from the respective programmes. This is not included in the budget for the culture programme.

7. Management and Administration

The Embassy of Denmark will be in charge of the approval of projects and disbursement of funds to local partners. The Embassy will establish a short-term contract with the DCCD concerning technical assistance to the implementation and administration of the culture programme including assessment of project proposals, programme monitoring and reporting. DCCD will sub-contract a local consultant to support the local partners, oversee their ongoing activities and elaborate progress reports on the local activities. The local consultant will refer to DCCD.

List of abbreviations:

DCCD	Danish Center for Culture and Development
HUGOU	Human Rights and Good Governance Programme
KIMFF	Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival
NCED	National Centre for Educational Development
TAS	Technical Advisory Services – Development Assistance
ToT	Training of Trainers