



20 June 2017

Performing Empowerment - Breaking barriers for people with disabilities in Sri Lanka

Can you imagine spending the whole life in a house and never leave it? Or walking down the road and being called ugly? Or being told that you are 'unable' to take up vocational training and employment? If you have not experienced these moments, you are properly in a different position than approximately 10 per cent of Sri Lankan society with a disability, who are facing at least one of these situations in their lives. The question is: What can be done to overcome stigma and discrimination to live a life with dignity like everyone else?

Contrary to common belief in Sri Lanka, it is not the individual with a disability who represents a burden – the status of being 'useless' or 'without any value and capacity' is caused by stigmatization and exclusion. Denied opportunities, such as school education, vocational training and employment have serious implications for the individual, the family, and eventually Sri Lankan society. Physical and mental diversity are not a disadvantage, but a call for each community to think in creative ways, and to recognize the real ability of each individual. Only if society changes its perspective and facilitates access to education, training and employment by providing more support for specific needs, everyone can benefit. People with disabilities would get an opportunity to live an independent life and to contribute to the well-being and development of society.

The project 'Performing Empowerment – Breaking the barriers for people with disabilities in Sri Lanka' seeks to tackle the current situation by both empowering people with disabilities, and making their real abilities visible. It is executed between the 26 June and 3 August 2017 in Batticaloa and Jaffna. 'Performing Empowerment' offers an uncommon approach to fight discrimination and to promote inclusion: it combines mixed-abled dance and disability rights education. By bringing people with and without disabilities together, the project aims to open up a dialogue, and to eventually eradicate prejudices.

'Performing Empowerment' is implemented by the German non-profit association 'VisAbility', which is composed by people with and without disabilities from Germany and Sri Lanka. It offers mixed-abled dance and disability rights workshops in Batticaloa and Jaffna. The workshops end with a flashmob and three public performances in each city.

The composition of VisAbility's leading team is unique. The mixed-abled dance workshop is conducted by Gerda König and Mahesh Eranga Umagiliya. Mrs. König is a German choreographer of a mixed-abled dance company with a strong record of projects with people with and without disabilities in Sri Lanka and other developing countries (she is also disabled and a wheelchair user). Mr. Umagiliya is a Sri Lankan dancer, choreographer and director of Meranga Fine Arts Ensemble. The disability rights workshop is provided by Helena-Ulrike Marambio, a disability consultant with professional experience in the Global South, and the Sri Lankan lawyer Nirma Karunarathna.

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'Performing Empowerment' in Batticaloa (26 June – 2 July 2017)

Workshops take place at the Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies (SVIAS) of the Eastern University.

Mixed-Abled Dance Workshop	26, 27, 29 June, 1 July 2017
Disability Rights Workshop	28 June 2017
Flashmob in town	30 June 2017
Performances (SVIAS of Eastern University; Gandhi Park)	2 July 2017

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