



5 January 2018

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

Can you imagine to be stared at every day because of your physical appearance? Or being rejected when looking for a job because you have prosthesis? Or being told that you are 'unable' to take up vocational training and employment? Approximately 10 per cent of Sri Lankan society has a disability and faces 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?

One measure is to make society aware of its misbelief and resulting negative attitudes that often lead to stigmatization and exclusion. In several occasions people with disabilities are perceived as being 'useless' or 'without any value and capacity' without any reason. A second measure is to eventually implement the International Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in Sri Lanka that would provide protection for each individual, as well as obligations of the State to fight discrimination and to create equal opportunities for people with disabilities to live an independent life. However, despite the elaboration of a national draft bill in 2016, its approval remains pending. The upcoming election could constitute an important turning point, if politicians eventually push for its incorporation on domestic level.

The project 'Performing Empowerment – Breaking the barriers for people with disabilities in Sri Lanka' seeks to tackle above described situation by both empowering people with disabilities, and making their real abilities visible. It is executed by the German non-profit association 'VisAbility' in Batticaloa and Jaffna. VisAbility is composed by staff with and without disabilities from Germany and Sri Lanka, and 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 eradicate prejudices. The project ends with two public performances in each district.

The composition of VisAbility's team is unique. The mixed-abled dance workshop is conducted by Gerda König and Mahesh Umagiliya. Mrs. König is a German choreographer of a mixed-abled dance company with a strong record of international 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 (Wattala), who has recently won the Bunka Awards 2017. 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 Karunarathne.

The project 'Performing Empowerment' is sponsored by the German Federal Foreign Office, Schmitz Stiftungen and the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom (UK). It is supported by the Swamy Vipulananda Institute of Aesthetic Studies (SVIAS) of the Eastern University, the Church of American Ceylon Mission (CACM), and Meranga Fine Arts Ensemble.

'Performing Empowerment' in Eravur

Two mixed-abled public performances will take place on the 7 January 2018.

Time: 4 - 5pm

Place: Vandaramulla Market

Time: 5 - 6pm

Place: Sivapuranam Savakadu

If you wish further details on our project, please get in touch with our staff:

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