



eNTRUST

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust Newsletter

December 2013
Volume 3: Issue 3

Vision

The establishment and protection of a just, equitable and peaceful society

Mission

To collectively promote peace, reconciliation and human rights, sharing responsibility, resources and risks through strategic partnerships with civil society, public sector, business community, diaspora, academia and donors

Building Peace through Creative Means - Arts and Culture Initiatives of NTT

"Any form of art is a form of power; it has impact, it can effect change - it can not only move us, it makes us move." -- Ossie Davis (American actor and playwright)

For the first time ever, Tamil and Muslim students from Jaffna District in the north of Sri Lanka came together and produced radio dramas on social issues for which they wrote the scripts, and 'performed' them. The radio station received more than 10,000 text messages from listeners lauding this initiative.

Further south in Badulla, a multi-cultural group of students from 3 schools (Muslims, Sinhalese and Tamil respectively) was formed following their participation in workshops where they produced 10 stories for digital story telling. This initiative was endorsed by the Provincial Director of Education, as well as the principals and teachers of the three schools.

In both instances, students said they received the opportunity to relate to each other as equals and peers, were able to better understand the need to be culturally sensitive and to respect differences, as topics such as tolerance towards different ideas and practices; caste; food; division between urban and rural populations; religion; education to name a few, were discussed. These students have now become friends, and are in contact via a web-based networking forum.

NTT supported Noolaham Foundations's uploading of more than 30,000 pages of 262 books to an internet library which provides a global readership the opportunity to access Tamil literature and information at no cost.

.... contd p 2

In this Issue

Building peace through creative means – article on the Arts and Culture Portfolio of NTT	1
Ingirunthu – film on the plantation community scheduled for release in Sri Lanka	3
Book launch -- 'Sinhala literature in the era of ethnic war in Sri Lanka: A pluralistic review'	4

Building Peace through Creative Means - Arts and Culture Initiatives of NTT

An exhibition of mystery paintings, produced by persons who were traumatised as a result of abuse, imprisonment, war and violence, was held to raise funds to sustain the activities of an organisation that works with these victims.

These are some of the 40 initiatives that have been supported by NTT as part of its Arts and Culture Portfolio.

Since 2001 – the year the organisation was founded -- NTT has pioneered the use of arts and culture in peace building as a means to ease inter and intra community tensions, as a catalyst for social change, and as a vehicle to drive peaceful co-existence & intercultural dialogue. Artistic and cultural expressions provide creative means of resolving problems and addressing social inequalities. The arts have the added advantage of being perceived as a non-threatening and non-controversial mode of engagement and thereby creates space for communication even in an otherwise restricted environment. Artists can also act as mediators creating empathy and better understanding among communities.

The Arts and Culture portfolio represents 25% of our financial support to organisations, largely women's and youth organizations, while several endeavors by reputed and creative artists island-wide have also been funded.

In 2010, NTT supported the production of Trikon Arts Centre's 'Ravanesan', an Eastern Sri Lankan *koothu* style opera by Prof. Sinnaiah Maunaguru of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. With a cast of over 30 players, an aspect of the mythical character Ravana was chosen to portray the enduring pain and suffering caused to women due to his ill-advised step to wage war. The anti-war message brought to the boards was even more poignant as it came from the war-torn east soon after the end of the armed conflict.

NTT's support opened many doors for Trikon Arts apart from the opportunity to stage the *koothu* after nearly three decades.

Prof. Maunaguru was invited to present the *koothu* tradition at a Forum in Norway, perform at the Annual Galle Literary Festival in Sri Lanka in January 2011 and was extended an invitation to explore opportunities for collaboration from the veteran Kandyan dance performer Ms. Upekha Chitrasena combining the two traditions. Academics from Peradeniya University Fine Arts Department have also shown interest in inviting the troupe to perform at their annual *wala* theatre festival, with a view to popularizing various folk traditions of Sri Lanka, especially those that are not "mainstream".

This example amplifies the spiral effect that seed initiatives such as this can have, not only in the message they deliver and the power of the medium of delivery, but in their ability to reach out to a range of audiences who are otherwise disconnected.

This has been the strategic direction of the Arts and Culture portfolio of NTT since 2009 when the armed conflict ended. The aim is to further the understanding of rights and peace within Sri Lanka through creative means while providing a base for visual and performing artists, particularly those that embrace activism to display their work.

At the same time, NTT also adds to Sri Lanka's artistic community by bringing a culturally rich and vibrant selection of performing arts from beyond its borders -- from South Africa, India and Pakistan. These cultural offerings commemorate the birth of its namesake Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam with performances organised in Colombo, Galle and Jaffna.

Artists have included veteran bharatnatyam dancer Alarmel Valli, kathak dancer Aditi Mangaldas, the Tribhangi Dance Theatre group from South Africa and Pakistan sufi drummers Pappu and Jura Saen.

contd p 3



As an indigenous philanthropic organisation, in keeping with our mission to engage strategically with our stakeholders and partners, we regularly invite individuals and organisations to partner with us in fostering a vibrant tradition of artistic and cultural expressions, and help bring local talent and traditions that would otherwise not have a chance to be seen or heard to new and different platforms.

Our strategic plan vis-à-vis arts and culture for the next 3 years is to allocate support that will promote a pluralistic and vibrant arts and culture sector, that contributes to overall peace building, reconciliation & democratisation efforts in the country through dialogues, artistic expressions, awareness creation, advocacy and networking.

Jacqueline Netto, NTT

Ingirunthu -- film on the plantation community released in Sri Lanka

Two years ago, NTT provided part-funding to Vilimbuhal Performing Arts to produce a feature length film on the history and subjugation of the plantation community in Sri Lanka. The first screening of the film Ingirunthu – Here and Now (produced by Sumathy Sivamohan in Tamil with English and Sinhala sub-titles) took place in Colombo in December 2012.

The film worked with groups of people from the plantation community in and around Hatton and Nuwara Eliya, particularly women and youth, and focused on the dialogue that emerges from the community about their needs and concerns.

An articulation of their rightful desire to be treated as equal citizens, the film seeks to raise awareness among the rest of the country's population

about the issues faced by the plantation community.

The film was released in Colombo at Cine City, Maradana and Wijitha Hatton on 20 December. There are plans to screen it in other locations in Sri Lanka as well.

A special press briefing and media screening was held on 10 December and on 20 December an event celebrating the release was held in Hatton with the communities that participated in the film-making process. The film will also be screened at the 10th Asian Women's Film Festival in Delhi in March 2014 and producer Sumathy Sivamohan has been invited to speak at the event.

Ingirunthu received an honorable mention grant from the US-based Global Film Initiative.



It was the film's promise of artistic excellence that led to its selection; cinematically it demonstrated innovative and accomplished story telling.

--Susan Weeks Coulter
for Global Film Initiative
California, USA

