

## Cultural Relations Collection

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# Enabling [dis]abled artists across culture and arts fosters positive peace in Nepal

Nar Bahadur Saud

Cultural relations  
and peacebuilding

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# Acknowledgements

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## The British Council

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## DOI

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# Foreword

The Cultural Relations Collection essay series, produced by the British Council's Research and Insight Team, asks early-career and established researchers to examine the theory and practice of cultural relations. We invite fresh perspectives on what has been the British Council's business for almost 90 years – building connections, understanding and trust.

This edition explores how cultural relations can contribute to peacebuilding in different settings and contexts.

Peacebuilding, and the erosion of peace, are intimately connected to many major challenges facing us nationally and internationally. No community that is divided by conflict, or the expectation or experience of conflict, can give adequate attention to less immediate but equally destructive threats, such as environmental degradation or economic instability.

Yet those same factors, left unaddressed, can only increase the likelihood of conflict. The result is a vicious circle which is increasingly difficult to escape.

These essays help us to understand what is meant by a cultural relations approach to peacebuilding and to demonstrate that this approach is both valid and valuable.

Each of the essays comes from a different disciplinary and regional perspective, but some common themes are evident.

One is Galtung's concept of positive (as opposed to negative) peace: peace as an active participatory experience, rather than simply the absence of violence. This supports proponents of cultural relations – and is a riposte to those who argue that soft power interventions in hard power situations are mere wishful thinking.

Also implicit in many of the essays is the importance of enabling safe spaces in which cultural relations can take place. Inclusivity and an atmosphere of trust are a *sine qua non* if citizens and communities are to experience a sense of their own agency.

Related to this is deep listening (listening experienced as a positive and empathetic activity, rather than simply an absence of interruption), a topic explored in depth by one of our essayists. Listening to others' truth and speaking our own, not only to power but to ourselves, is at the core of cultural relations – and especially in our peacebuilding efforts. No true or lasting peace is built on half-truths and evasions.

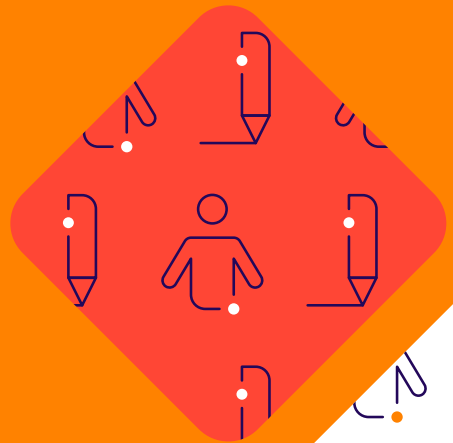
Indeed, the importance of facing up to our own organisational and national history is addressed directly in one of these essays; and behind several authors stands the shadow of colonialism.

As in previous editions of this series, there is much here for readers, and the British Council itself, to reflect on and absorb. Peacebuilding is a complex and constantly developing subject, to which these essays make a valuable contribution.

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. To meet that goal, we will continue to explore with researchers, artists and peace practitioners how our cultural relations work can contribute to peacebuilding globally; this series is just the start.

**Scott McDonald**

Chief Executive, British Council



# Preface to the Cultural Relations Collection

Welcome to the latest edition of the Cultural Relations Collection. As always, it has been stimulating to read fresh perspectives on cultural relations by new voices in the field. Previous editions in the Collection have examined cultural relations and climate change, and the impact of COVID-19 on cultural exchange. In 2022, we invited submissions on cultural relations and peacebuilding, given our renewed emphasis on the role of building trust and connections as central to the conditions required for sustainable peace, and in the spirit of what John-Paul Lederach calls ‘an approach that addresses the culture of violence by transforming it into the culture of dialogue’.

This is not a new area for the British Council, which emerged from the global crisis leading up to the Second World War in the realisation that building trust and understanding between the UK and the rest of the world was crucial. In 2018, which marked the centenary of the end of the First World War, the centenary of Nobel Peace Laureate Nelson Mandela, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, the British Council worked with partners in Northern Ireland on the conference *Peace and Beyond*<sup>1</sup>, an examination of global approaches to building lasting peace including reflections from contributors from countries including Lebanon, South Africa, and Colombia.

In 2023, the need to examine the conditions for peacebuilding are as relevant as they were in 2018. Colleagues around the world continue to work in communities affected by conflict, such as Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Yemen, to name but three. At the time of writing, we are working on research on the role of cultural events in addressing conflict and sharing the values of freedom and international co-operation, given the UK’s role in hosting Eurovision on behalf of Ukraine.

And so, to the individual contributions herein. At the 2018 *Peace and Beyond* conference, Judith Thompson, Chief Commissioner for the Commission for Victims and Survivors<sup>2</sup>, said: ‘Building social trust [...] in a society transitioning from

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1 [www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace](http://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace)

2 [www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace](http://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace)

conflict is an essential ingredient to [...] building a better future for everyone and the generations that follow.' This collection builds on that imperative by breaking down varied approaches to the building of trust.

Alice Naisbitt examines the role of science as a peacebuilding tool in two ways: that the connections built reinforce the trust vital to harmonious relations; and that the outcomes of scientific co-operation address drivers of conflict, such as resource scarcity. As with Hannah Dalgliesh's contribution on the soft power of astronomy in a previous collection<sup>3</sup>, Naisbitt underpins the role of science as providing neutral, common ground for collaboration.

Naisbitt does not shy away from the historic challenges that have been presented to the British Council over the years, and the accusation that cultural relations – in science, arts, language, or education – run the risk of being instrumentalised for the soft power outcomes, rather than their development objectives. This theme is picked up in Daniel Feather's fascinating history of educational co-operation between the UK and South Africa, including through the apartheid era when South Africa was globally isolated. He draws the distinction between

cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, although highlights where those lines can become blurred. While not uncritical of the role of the UK and the British Council over this period, his essay makes a powerful argument for the place of education in supporting a country's transition from structural violence to a more equitable and peaceful state.

Three essays focus on arts and culture as tools for building peace. George Wilkes et al. consider the role of the cultural relations organisation in bridging the local and the global; the need not to overlook the smallest detail of any given conflict, while still recognising the power of building links across borders and amplifying the voice of those affected by conflict. Their emphasis on the need to deal with memory, whether of previous friendships, or of deep trauma, also harks back to contributions in *Peace and Beyond*<sup>4</sup> by Candice Mama and Cindy Mizher.

The role of the arts to make visible what may previously have been hidden, as well as to imagine new futures, is central to the essay of Daniela Fazio-Vargas and Carlos Pineda-Ramos. They make a powerful case for artistic expression as a means by which different voices can be elevated and building a space in

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3 [www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/cultural-relations](http://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-series/cultural-relations)

4 [www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace](http://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/reflections-inclusive-peace)

which difference is recognised and valued, and that only in this way, can true peace be achieved. Nar Bahadur Saud takes this up in his essay that reminds us that before the arts can support peace and justice, they too must recognise difference. His contribution centres on the need to empower and enable disabled people to express themselves through the arts, and that in doing so not only addresses the inequalities they face as individuals but will contribute to more equitable and peaceful societies.

2022 brought sport to the fore in the discourse on positive peacebuilding – that is, not just addressing violent conflict, but addressing the drivers of conflict, such as inherent violence against marginalised communities, or the continuation of structural inequities. Many people looked to the World Cup in Qatar with mixed feelings, as to whether this was ‘sportswashing’ or an opportunity to open up a human rights dialogue on the world stage. In his essay, Grant Jarvie explores the link between sports and diplomacy, and suggests a more prominent role for sport in development, particularly in peacebuilding, given its emphasis on team spirit, co-operation, and solidarity.

Lastly, Emily Kasriel examines a concept at the heart of peacebuilding – listening. Her essay on deep listening illustrates an approach that prepares individuals for encounters across any divides they find within their communities, however they are experiencing conflict. Drawing on both theory and practice, she draws out the transformational nature of this method, and the impact it has had on individuals and communities around the world, enabling them to truly see, hear and understand the person opposite them.

One of the participants in a deep listening exercise said it allowed her ‘to create an atmosphere of inclusivity, trust and positive discourse’. It feels as if we are in a time in which that approach is urgently needed. I hope too that this Cultural Relations Collection makes a similarly positive contribution, and I urge all readers to embrace that spirit.

**Christine Wilson**

Director of Research and Insight, British Council



# Introduction

This essay explores how cultural relations could contribute to promoting positive peace<sup>5</sup> within individuals and communities by exploring the connection between the arts and disabilities in the post-conflict backdrop of Nepal. The purpose of this essay is to document the knowledge of the local culture and arts that exist in communities in relation to peace and disability. To meet the purpose of this essay, first, it situates the background of disability and artistic engagement of disabled people in Nepal. Second, it is supported by the exploration of the arts, culture, and disability nexus. Third, I review the practical and policy limitations of disability in Nepal. Fourth, the essay offers the findings of research that should be considered to promote peace in society. The essay concludes with a summary of the results, indicating the recommendation for and scope of further study.

The information for this essay was gathered from both primary and secondary sources following a qualitative research approach. A literature review consultation was undertaken with five disabled artists and five people involved in the

culture and arts sectors working with disability issues in Kathmandu. Additionally, I consulted the feelings of a group of disabled conflict victims representing seven different districts of Nepal who often use art mediums to interconnect, and my own personal reflections and previous works on disability issues were also included along with attending some disability and art-related interactions, theatre performances, and exhibitions in Kathmandu during the months of December 2022 and January 2023. All respondents consented before the interactions. Based on the above activities and outcomes of the results, I assert that for disabled people (especially disabled artists) to be able to continue dialogue and to make their artistic activities/products available in the existing culture in the community, it is necessary to create an inclusive environment. Within this environment, mutual respect and willingness to assist disabled artists must be more significant than the financial constraints that hinder efforts to make life easier in underdeveloped post-conflict societies such as Nepal. The results show that the ability of disabled individuals to become artists has been

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5 As of 2006, Nepal's peace process is in a transitional phase. In terms of legal advancements, the disability sector has made significant progress in the country. However, there is still much work to be done in terms of implementation. Here, the concept of positive peace refers to the attitudes, institutions, and structures that contribute to establishing and maintaining peaceful societies. For more: Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney, June 2020.

enhanced by the support they receive from friends, families, senior artists, government, and non-governmental sectors in Nepal.

Nepal exhibits various cultural, religious, traditional, and creative/ artistic distinctiveness (Tamang, 2001) as a landlocked country in South Asia. Several factors influence the diversity of livelihoods in the country, including the caste system, language, and geography. The country is home to more than 126 caste groups, including ethnic minorities, 123 languages/ dialects are spoken, three different geographical landscapes cover the hills and Himalayas, along with numerous religious sites, pilgrimages and deities, and traditional sculptures that are celebrated at various times of the year (CBS, 2011). While rich in diversity, this has been loosely transformed into social, structural, economic, and emotional prosperity over time. The country was adversely affected by a decade-long armed conflict (1996–2006) that demanded a reduction in structural violence (Einsiedel et al., 2012). Despite this, the research findings indicate that poor and marginalised communities in Nepal, including those with disabilities, have yet to see substantial improvements in their lives.

The structural and socioeconomic costs of disability are high worldwide. The World Bank (2020) estimated that more than one billion people are living with a form of disability,

which is 15 per cent of the world's total population. Of these, 80 per cent of people live in developing or underdeveloped countries (World Bank, 2020). Similarly, the Central Bureau of Statistics (2011), National Population and Housing Census Report stated that about two per cent (513,321) of the total population lived with disabilities in Nepal. However, disability rights activists in Nepal argue that the number of disabled people is greater than that of the government figures. Findings of previous studies indicated that disabled people experience multiple problems in the world, including in Nepal (Lord et al., 2016; Lord and Stein, 2015; Muderredzi et al., 2017). In addition, the impact of disability induced by armed conflict in Nepal is enormous. The impact of the Civil War on the disabled population of Nepal has been profound, affecting their personal, economic, social, and political lives. On a personal level, many disabled people suffer from physical and mental health problems and have difficulty accessing educational, healthcare, and social services. At an economic level, disabled people have limited access to employment opportunities and are often unable to access government schemes and subsidies (Lamichhane, 2015).

The Nepal Situation Analysis report by Brigitte Rohwerder indicates that disabled people are often excluded from decision making, and their voices are rarely heard in regard to

shaping policy decisions (IDS, 2020) and the implementation of policies is weak. Furthermore, stigma associated with disability regarding education, job, healthcare, and discrimination was found during my interactions with respondents. Additionally, the repercussions of disability induced by armed conflict in Nepal are wide-ranging, and the situation remains unsatisfactory (Lamichhane, 2015). It is vital that the government, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders work together to ensure that the rights of disabled people are recognised and respected. Lord and Stein (2015) and Castro (2020) stated that access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities is limited, as are public awareness campaigns to combat negative attitudes and stigma surrounding disability, but that these limitations occur at an increasing ratio in poor countries such as Nepal. Whilst existing scholarship does not explicitly address how arts can enable disabled people to promote positive peace, it does suggest that arts can be a helpful tool in peace building efforts more broadly (Shank & Schirch, 2008; Ware et al., 2022; Zelizer, 2003). In this context, it is important to recognise that a positive peace approach not only addresses violent conflict and its drivers during and after the conflict, but also the cultural and structural violence that results from inequality and harmful norms in communities.

My proposition is that the arts support positive peace building processes. Positive peace, which is the framework I am using here, also engages with the causes of cultural and structural violence, which refers to the sorts of inequalities that are visited by disabled people.

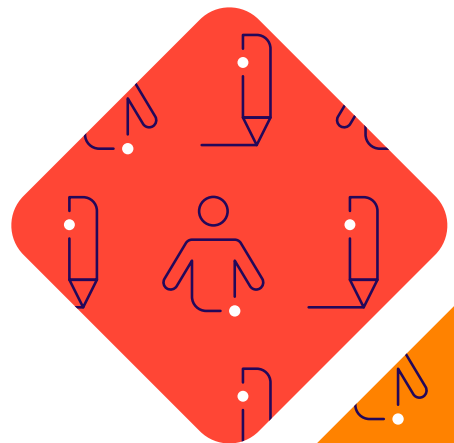
To look for a peaceful community, it can be difficult to feel positive peace at the individual or community level without including disabled people in public spaces through artistic engagement in Nepal. Since government benefits are insufficient or unavailable to a large extent, public space allows disabled artists to connect with community members and generate additional confidence and income – though not in all cases – through their arts. In such cases, works of art provide opportunities to achieve confidence emotionally and financially. If disabled artists are precluded from participating in artistic works that support the building of harmony in their communities, structural violence remains in place. To accomplish this, government, community, and development partners should work collaboratively, demonstrating empathy rather than sympathy, to achieve positive peace in communities. In such cases, positive peace helps minimise direct violence in communities where people can realise that the effect of direct and cultural violence is minimised.

# Positive peace: creating a culture, arts, and disability nexus

This section of the essay shows the connection between culture, arts, and disability to promote positive peace in the Nepali context. Culture is typically defined as a set of shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices that are specific to a particular group of people in Nepal. It can include things such as language, art, music, literature, technology, and other aspects of life that are shared by a group of people. Culture is an important concept in research because it can have a significant impact on how people think, feel, and behave, and use arts to express themselves. Likewise, art can be defined as a significant form of expression for artists, including disabled artists, and their representation. In other words, artists can stimulate viewers' feelings, and the work of disabled artists can contribute to social change (Hickey-Moody, 2021). In this sense, disability is an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between disabled people who face attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Anderson (2004) defines peace as a two-dimensional construct with both objective and subjective measures. Similarly, Galtung & Fischer (2013) define peace as the absence of direct violence between states and the massive killing of humans. These articles suggest that the definition of peace has changed over time. Kende (1989) found that the concept of peace has changed over time, becoming more secular and focused on national states. The content of peace has changed along with modernity. Bönisch (1981) found that classical definitions of peace are inadequate because they do not consider the relationship between peace and societal forces. The focus of peace research has changed over time from interstate war to civil war (Gleditsch et al., 2014). Together, these articles suggest that the definition of peace has changed over time, becoming more secular, focusing on states, and considering the relationship between peace and societal forces. Engaging disability, artists not only liberate them to showcase their talents, but also receive a platform of longing for peace.

Disability art is characterised by the principles of transgression, affirmation, and resistance (Cameron, 2011). By focusing on disability and peace, Nusabum and Lopez (2019) hope to confront and expose the systematic devaluation of disabled people. Stahl argues that disability art encourages a new ethic of communion through which embodied vulnerabilities are shared, celebrated, and reoriented back to the ground of being (Stahl, 2019). Arts programmes have increasingly found favour in disability communities. (Darcy et al., 2019). By understanding how arts and disabilities interact, there is the potential for learning opportunities. Transgression, resistance, and affirmation are hallmarks of disability arts, and artmaking induces critical reflection that allows attitudes to change and creative responses to differences to be formulated. Likewise, enhancing positive peace is a process that involves cultivating new cultures and environments by allowing underprivileged groups to cooperate with each other and establishing normalised relations between politics, society, economics, and humanitarians during the post-conflict time (Reychler, 2006). These findings suggest that disability arts have the potential to contribute to peace. More research is needed to elucidate the relationship between disability, arts, and peace in a Nepali context.



# Situation of disability inclusion in nepal: policy and practises

Some Acts and policies introduced by the Government of Nepal have made provisions to address the rights of disabled people. This begins with the adaptation of the Disabled Protection and Welfare Act of 1982 in response to the UN promulgation of Action Concerning Disabled Persons in 1982. The Act has secured several rights and benefits, including waivers of educational fees and free medical examinations, among others, for disabled people. Likewise, Nepal ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2010. Disability rights are well articulated in the Constitution of Nepal 2015 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2017. Prior to this, the Comprehensive Peace Accord was also proclaimed to address conflict-induced disability in 2006 as a framework of post-conflict peace building.

These legal instruments also prohibit discrimination and violence based on disability and provide equal access to individuals with disabilities in all sectors, including education, health, employment, as well as information and communication services. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens (MoWCSW) and a National Disability

Direction Committee are responsible at the national level, while at the municipality level there should be a disability coordination committee in place. This provision might have helped disabled people to reach out to local governance. In the case of Nepal, people understand disability in communities as a physical disability or dependency. A primary concern has been the stigmatisation of disability issues that are deeply embedded in sociocultural attitudes. My previous experience shows that disabled people, including artists, were rarely involved in artistic processes.

Likewise, there is provision in the constitution that all citizens have equal rights and status, but the discrimination is not in law making but in implementation. According to Article 18 of the Constitution of Nepal 2072, all citizens shall be equal in the eyes of the law under the right to equality. No one shall be deprived of equal protection of the law. It has been stipulated that there will be no discrimination based on disability in the application of general laws, and special provisions can be made following the law for the protection, empowerment, and development of disabled people. For instance, one of the disabled artists consulted for

this essay indicated that people show their sympathy with us when they purchase our products (paintings) considering they did it because we are disabled. This is not appropriate. This means that disabled artists attempt their best to create their arts as equally as normal artists.

Similarly, in Article 31 of the Constitution, the education-related rights of people with various types of disability are ensured, while in Article 39, children with disabilities are guaranteed the right to facilities with special protection from the state. Moreover, in Article 42 of the Constitution, citizens with disabilities will have the right to live with self-respect and dignity with recognition of diversity and equal access to public service facilities. In the same article, it is mentioned that disabled people will receive priority opportunities in education, health, employment, housing, and social security according to the law. In this case, there are some good examples that started being implemented in Nepal as well. Disabled people receive platforms to express their emotions through artistic activities these days, with the help of disability accessibility features: sign language, audio description, braille, subtitle, and accessible infrastructure.

In 2009, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Nepal is party to, was approved. The Incheon Strategy (2015–2022) for the Asia and Pacific region is also being implemented in Nepal. The Act on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2074 and the Act on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Regulation on Rights 2077 are being implemented to end discrimination against disabled people and to respect their civil political, economic, social, and cultural rights in the country. These instruments envision to empower disabled people to participate in policy making and development processes to ensure a self-sustaining and dignified living environment. As a result, many disabled people have been found to organise and working to empower other people throughout the country. However, Laxmi Nepal<sup>6</sup> asserted that the implementation of laws in practice is often weak, and miles to walk ahead to improve the situation of disabled people in Nepal.

In addition, the 15<sup>th</sup> Periodical Plan of the Government of Nepal and Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of economic and social empowerment for a dignified and self-reliant life of disabled people include the subject of safe, inclusive, and accessible access to public

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<sup>6</sup> Laxmi Nepal is a disability and women right advocate. I attended her presentation in Martin Chautari on December 27, 2022, in Kathmandu.

places including disability-friendly schools. However, the major problem is the implementation of policies into practice. As a result, a large number of disabled people are not able to enjoy rights and facilities. Even to comply with the policies formulated, an inclusive space is essential for disabled artists/people to be able to continue dialogue and get their creative activities and products accessible and recognised in communities (Ware et al., 2022; Wood, 2015). This can be reached through collaborative efforts of government, community, and development partners – adopting not sympathetic, but empathetic,

beliefs and behaviours. There has been a significant improvement in the situation within the last few years, but there is still a lot to be done to address the problems that exist within this disability sector. In this sense, a continuous process and more collaboration will be helpful.





# Engaging in arts and culture: a space for disability enablement in nepal

In this section, I assess the status of disabled artists in the arts sector in Nepal, how they have contributed to promoting positive peace, and what can be done to sustain it. I found that they experienced mixed feelings. Through legal and social changes, they found that their participation in public forums, services, and livelihood opportunities is steadily improving. Despite this, most believe that significant improvements are necessary to make their lives more comfortable. Some artists created paintings and illustrations at home. However, it is difficult for them to exhibit their paintings in public because of a lack of financial and other essential support in Nepal. In addition, people working in the disability sector believe that the participation of disabled artists in creative spaces provides some options for enhancing peace in communities by adopting positive attitudes and behaviors towards disabled people, respecting their artistic and cultural activities. Information collected as part of the research for this essay suggests that disabled people in Nepal were found to have limited opportunities to participate in dialogues and

recognise their contributions. The following sections summarise how positive peace has flourished – can flourish – through the support of disabled artists and others engaged.

Over the years, scholars, researchers, and practitioners have written about the arts and culture in relation to disability. Scholarly papers suggest that art can enable those with disability in several ways. Hickey-Moody (2021) found that art is a significant source of expression for people with disabilities and that artists with disabilities can create social change. Fuller et al. (2009) found that creative therapies can allow individuals to explore and express conscious and unconscious feelings, working towards the resolution of interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict through the process of self-exploration, self-discovery, self-determination, and self-help. Duckworth et al. (2020) found that the social aspects of group interaction and the physical advantages of interactive technology can be exploited to enhance the participation of disabled people in creative and artistic activities. Wong (2020) found that advances in Assertive Technology (AT) and

changes in federal law have propelled the engagement of those with disabilities in the arts. These papers suggest that art can enable disabled people by promoting expression, creating social change, promoting exploration and self-discovery, strengthening participation, advancing AT, and changing laws.

- Keep people involved in disability issues

Disability is not an isolated issue. Disabled people are members of families and communities. However, experience shows that disability is often overlooked, which is a form of cultural violence towards them (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). To promote peace in society, it is necessary to work closely and connect emotionally with disabled people. For instance, a theatre director<sup>7</sup> working in Kathmandu shares their experience:

*'I want to work on disability issues because I relate to these issues very closely. I have a childhood friend with a physical disability. He is also active in the development sector, and we often talk about social issues. I am inspired to contribute to the sector through what I am doing. I always keep disability inclusion in mind when I plan my activities as a director, actor, or writer. As a result,*

*we designed our theatre to be disability friendly for the first time in Nepal. We prepared plays that included disability issues. However, as I would like to do for multiple reasons, we are not able to engage disabled actors in theatre. I feel pleased when disabled people come to watch the theatre here and their needs are fulfilled to an extent'.*

People begin engaging in disability issues. They gradually believe that diversity and coexistence are what makes society strong and vibrant. In society, everyone's needs and existence should be respected. For instance, a theatre play 'Kubhindoko Katha' – which was performed during the International Theatre Festival 2022 in Kathmandu in the presence of audiences including disabled people – brings the audience closer to the ultimate truth of nature. By showing that nature has made us distinct from each other based on our strengths and weaknesses, it emphasises the need for us to accept each other's existence. In addition, it addresses the differences in abilities and roles that exist between our families and society.

Likewise, a photo exhibition campaign '14 Stories: Living Memories of War<sup>8</sup>' initiated by the National Network of

7 Somnath Khanal is an active theatre director and actor in Kathmandu, Nepal. He is also one of the creative minds to structure Mandala Theatre in a disability-friendly manner. I interviewed him on December 22, 2022.

8 The stories and photos can be accessed via a link. [issuu.com/dishabhrajshrestha/docs/giz\\_book\\_\\_web\\_\\_90b7e2e3bd745b?utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_source=www.photocircle.com.np](https://issuu.com/dishabhrajshrestha/docs/giz_book__web__90b7e2e3bd745b?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=www.photocircle.com.np)

Disabled Conflict Victims in Nepal with support from other development partners and local governments that supported the sharing of issues of disability and conflict in communities. The exhibition was held at the end of 2018, touring to 14 storytellers' districts – Myagdi, Kaski, East and West Rukum, Banke, Bardia, and Dolakha. In February 2019, the work was exhibited at a Staff College in Kathmandu. It documented the experiences of civilians who suffered from disabilities due to the conflict. These personal stories are the testimony of living witnesses who have directly experienced violence. Each photograph demonstrates the destructive nature of the conflict and completely rejects any rationale that might justify it. It is my hope that this exhibition will contribute to the establishment of lasting peace in society and that the government will develop policies and programs to heal the wounds of conflict victims.

Through the photo stories, audiences learn about the struggles, hopes, and aspirations of the victims. Although years have passed since the end of the conflict, victims have not received their right to truth, justice, and compensation. A visitor shares their reflections after participating in the exhibition, 'I found them [the photos] to be very powerful, in that they gave a clear explanation of how people are dealing with and coping with difficult times through pictures and words. Those who witnessed

and experienced the conflict were reminded of that period once again through these stories; for those who did not witness or experience the conflict, the younger generation, it was a reminder of the pain that the conflict has caused people...' This is how arts-based activities sensitise and help to share empathy through broadening the network for a positive impact.

- Meaningful participation relies on increasing disability accessibility features

Positive peace can only be achieved when disabled people can access the basic services they need. The world offers a variety of accessibility options for disabled people, including sign language, audio description, captioning, signage, and large prints, if necessary. However, in many cases in Nepal, they cannot receive these services. Cultural relations programmes are therefore instrumental in brokering and facilitating collaboration between government, community, and development partners in Nepal. The role of cultural relations programmes is to increase the access, engagement, and inclusion of disabled people. For instance, Mandala Theatre has built its infrastructure as disabled-friendly – this is the first time in this type – where the British Council in Nepal supported the Nepal International Theatre Festival (NITF) 2022,

supplying accessibility facilities during the performance<sup>9</sup>.

The disability activists shared that increasing numbers of people are realising that these accessibility facilities are not just for disabled people. Instead, these services help people to better understand these issues. Disabled artists shared that the use of social networks has been a great platform to share their work and become recognised. Similarly, the participation of disabled artists in public events such as exhibitions and festivals could be instrumental in changing the perception and behavior of the community towards disability. I attended some events in Nepal and found that they encouraged the spread of positive messages.

- Engaging in the arts maintains high confidence in disabled people

As a disabled person, a relatively neglected issue in the family and community, Rashmi Amatya<sup>10</sup>, a deaf visual artist in Kathmandu, acknowledged that they were neither heard nor treated seriously before they were known as an artist. While

participating in family or community decisions, they feel excluded and even not consulted. This is a structural problem and prejudice. Their roles were predetermined. A disabled (deaf) illustrator explains:

‘I wish I could take part in family (Puja) worship when it is performed, but my family members never invite me there; instead, I am engaged in kitchen work. This made me very unhappy. These discriminations can be found in the illustrations. The images used in my work often convey feelings of peace and an echo of the heart. Family, friends, and community actions may seem superficial, but they mean a lot to disabled people. Likewise, disabled dancers seem to have the opportunity to perform their dances at social gatherings, and community festivals are also a positive initiative undertaken by organisers in Nepal. This helps motivate other disabled people. In order to overcome these behaviours, disabled artists have accepted their artistic work as a means of building confidence and self-esteem.’

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9 For more: [nitfest.org/](http://nitfest.org/)

10 Rasmi is a Kathmandu-based visual artist who is also a beneficiary of the British Council in Nepal. On December 12, 2022, I conducted an interview with her with the help of a sign language expert - Nanu Shrestha. For more: [www.britishcouncil.org.np/wow-virtual-2020?fbclid=IwAR0QdpE6zWLeFhQcUk-KOPW0qilzHCyHZFbwddNlv\\_3ZfSHfTjwRngxesWA](http://www.britishcouncil.org.np/wow-virtual-2020?fbclid=IwAR0QdpE6zWLeFhQcUk-KOPW0qilzHCyHZFbwddNlv_3ZfSHfTjwRngxesWA)

They were further thankful for the support she received from organisations such as the British Council to enhance their skills and engagement.

- Family support makes disabled artists creative; secondary support helps them develop their talents

The results of my interactions and observations indicate that the role of family members is significantly important in bringing the artistic skills of disabled artists to the public. One painter emphasised that she could not continue her art if there was no support from her husband. Her husband keeps her going and provides emotional and financial support despite many hardships. This is the primary support that disabled artists need to strengthen their creativity. Similarly, secondary support is instrumental in growing artistic skills from home to the public forum. Aman Bamjan<sup>11</sup> was fully credited to Karuna Foundation, Nepal (a nongovernmental organisation) from which he gained name and fame. When his talent was recognised by the organisation in Nepal, recently after the earthquake in 2015, he was given access to training, mentorship, mobility, financial support, and exhibitions of his paintings, songs,

and videos in Kathmandu. Now, he is self-dependent, and his situation is financially better. He is also active on social media platforms. He is an inspiration for many disabled people in Nepal. This example shows that disabled people can become artists by transforming their hidden skills into reality. To promote peace in the community, giving access and support helps others to grow.

- Embrace empathy, not sympathy; disability is not pitiful

All positive interactions are built on the foundation of empathy. Whenever we interact with a stranger, we always think of ways in which we can leave another person feeling more energised after we have spoken. This can be accomplished by empathising with disabled individuals and their families. During my interactions, the participants shared that in Nepal many people still perceived disability as a curse for their previous birth. However, they do not think that disability could be the result of biological and physical failures, rather than religion and theology. This message is dominant in the community. People need to adapt to embrace empathy, considering disability as an unintended consequence in

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<sup>11</sup> Amir is a physically disabled artist with multiple talents. He uses his mouth to paint. He also writes and signs songs. I spoke to him on December 15, 2022, virtually. For more, see [www.spotlightnepal.com/2018/11/30/karuna-foundation-nepal-launches-painting-and-music-amir-bomjan-photo-features/](http://www.spotlightnepal.com/2018/11/30/karuna-foundation-nepal-launches-painting-and-music-amir-bomjan-photo-features/)

the life of an individual. Likewise, they provide space or create a motivational environment for disabled artists in their lives. For example, a non-government organisation started coordinating a job fair targeted at disabled people in Nepal in collaboration with different government and non-governmental agencies. These results are encouraging. The fair was mediated to provide opportunities for some participants. Meanwhile, disabled people are inspired by the success stories of similar people in communities.

This is meaningful in providing space for disabled artists who are role models in inspiring other disabled artists. This kind of companionship is an empowering and transformative asset for disabled artists.



# Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that cultural relations through arts provide an inclusive space to disabled people, where they can also transform their skills to be disabled artists by showcasing their arts, promoting positive peace within individuals and in communities in post-conflict societies such as Nepal. However, who is responsible for managing the space for disabled people? How can disabled people find it accessible to be artists? These questions are pertinent to communities in countries like Nepal. This is because of the limited resources available within the families of disabled people and with the government.

Accessible works initiated by some organisations in Kathmandu are appreciated for synergising a positive message and motivation for disabled people. For instance, the Mandala Theatre and British Council work with disabled artists are good examples, and a group of disabled conflict victims are supported by the German government through project implementation in Nepal. The scope of this work needs to be expanded in a collaborative manner. These questions are pertinent. The artistic and cultural engagements of disabled artists are a means of spreading positive peace among individuals, families, and communities. Having

an artistic space in a country such as Nepal is a challenge for disabled people due to social, cultural, and economic factors. Although the situation of people with disabilities is gradually improving, they still face multiple forms of violence.

Despite limited time and information, this essay attempts to explore a distinct field of knowledge production connecting arts and disability. This could potentially strengthen the concept of positive peace and show how that concept can contribute to disabled people by helping them to be artists, which is meaningful in life and society. However, access to inclusive spaces for disabled people is limited. Thus, families, friends, government agencies, and non-government organisations play a vital role in successful cases, which are still relatively rare. The research underpinning this essay has revealed that disabled artists can express their feelings via the arts, such as song, painting, theatre, illustration, and many more. For the concerned agencies, including non-government sectors – one of the most supportive systems to promote inclusive space in the country – it is recommended that organisations collaborate with local governments to reach out to maximum numbers of disabled people to engage

with potential artists. To this end, the essay suggests conducting additional research covering disabled artists with a large number of samples, including opinions from other stakeholders, such as family members and governments.

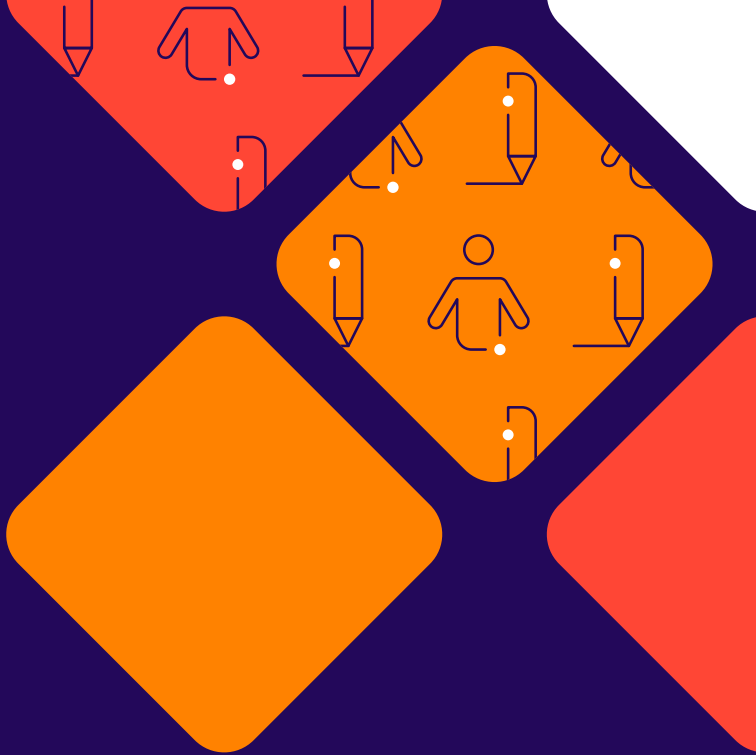




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