

# A.A.E.E. NEWSLETTER 14

## MERO SATHI PROJECT

*2017 (February)*



# Planning and organizing

The "Mero Sathi" Exchange Program 2017 February was organized by Asia Association of Education and Exchange Japan and its sister organization, A.A.E.E. Nepal. The process of organizing the program began when the application form for the Mero Sathi Exchange Program opened on January 4th 2017. It remained opened to January 31st 2017.



The program received overwhelming number of applicants in the first two weeks of the notice. The applicants were drafted and A.A.E.E. Nepal management team invited the selected applicants for an in-person interview in the second week of January. The second interview took place after the closing of application forms. A total of five applicants were selected after the in-person interview.

Among the five participants, two female participants were provided with a need and merit based scholarship. Equality and diversity was ensured while selecting the participants.

# WHY MERO SATHI EXCHANGE PROGRAM?



**1. Helps you receive international exposure**



**2. Helps you connect with people around the world**



**3. Helps you develop your communication skills**



**4. Helps you boost self-confidence**



The theme of the exchange program for February was “Sustainable Development Goals”. All the events and activities of the program were focused around trying to maximize awareness and meet the sustainable development goals. Except that, the objective of the student exchange program did not diverge from its existing objective. The activities were designed to assure cultural exchange between the Nepali and Japanese participants and meet the goal of building long-term relationship between future scholars of both countries.

The exchange program was designed to continue for a total of twelve days starting from February 23rd and ending on March 6th. The students would visit various rural places of Nepal and urban cities. The program proposed for students to visit four different regions of Nepal which were Kathmandu, Nuwakot, Pokhara and Sikkim. The activities in the first few days were designed to create a bond between the participants of two countries including ice-breakers and team building activities. The following activities were designed to create an atmosphere of cultural exchange where the students would also discuss and know critical issues of both countries. Visit to a local goat shelter funded by previous A.A.E.E. members in Nuwakot and visit to a hydropower station in the same district were envisioned to provide students a critical insight to the social and economic situation of Nepal and give them a platform to discuss possible solutions for the given situations.





Similarly, the students were to stay in the homes of the local residents of Sikles, a Gurung community to again learn and experience the diversity of Nepal's ethnic communities. The activities designed for their stay in Sikles demanded students to assess the socioeconomic situation of the village through participative research methods. Not only were the students to know about the community but they were required to facilitate an interactive discussion with the community members for the development of the community. The students were to come up with creative solutions for the existing problems of the community and discuss these solutions with the community members themselves.

The planned activities also included various cultural performances and food exchange program. The students of Nepal and Japan worked hard to plan and practice these cultural performances which reflected the diversity of their culture. The cultural performances included depiction of the most backward tribe of Nepal, the Raute to the most culturally rich ethnic groups of Nepal.

The team was also to visit a school in Pokhara and have various cultural exchange activities and games which mirrored Japanese culture. At the same time, a competition was to be held in Kathmandu University, School of Arts where undergraduate students from various universities and Mero Sathi Participants would present on various sustainable development goals.



# February 23rd, 2017

The students from Japan arrived Nepal on February 23rd. The first day of the program started off with a traditional Nepali welcome ceremony in A.A.E.E. Nepal office, Sanepa. The Japanese students and Prof. Seki were greeted with 'tika' and 'mala' (flower garland). The Nepali student members performed a welcome song to welcome the Japanese student members and it followed by an introduction session where all members introduced themselves. This session attempted to create a friendly atmosphere among the participants and helped them know one another. After the welcome ceremony, the student members headed back to the hotel. Later in the evening, a welcome dinner was organized where the Japanese student members and the staff members of A.A.E.E. Nepal sat together to enjoy a great meal.



# February 24th, 2017

The second day of the 'Mero Sathi' Exchange Program was allocated for team building exercises and activities to promote a collaborative environment among student members. The day started with the students meeting at the rooftop for an intense and interactive therapy known as Dance Movement Therapy. The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines dance/movement therapy as the psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual. The aim of this practice was also to make every individual more connected to themselves and attain relaxation of the body and mind. It was an excellent group activity where the group members would interact with one another to create a comfortable and communicative environment.

The therapy was facilitated by one of the experts of DMT. The therapy began with warming up, light exercises and dance movements. It was accompanied by group activities such as using a prop (thread) to exercise cooperation and understanding. In one of the activities, the team was divided into groups of 3 Nepalese and Japanese members where they had to balance a thread in their mouth and keep it straight without letting it drop. In another activity, a Japanese member and a Nepali member were kept together in a pair and they had to practice an activity called the "newspaper dance".







In this activity, one of the two partners would use a newspaper to express their emotions and the other would copy their emotions using body movements. This activity was practiced to help build trust and also to release any sort of tension. The students later sat together to share how they felt throughout the exercise.



In the day time, the students gathered to learn each other's cultural dances. The Nepali students wore a traditional Japanese costume known as 'Hapi' and learned a customary dance titled "Soran-bushi". While the Japanese students taught the Nepali student members their traditional dance, the Nepali members returned the favor by demonstrating a traditional Nepali dance. In this way, the student members from both countries joyfully learned the cultural dances of one another. The event was covered by a National Television channel, Image channel and later broadcasted in the news.



# February 25th, 2017

On the third day, the student members headed to Nuwakot for further programs.

Nuwakot is a district near to Kathmandu which is around two and half hours away.

In Nuwakot, the students, first of all visited the goat shelter funded by A.A.E.E. members in the past year. In the discussion session with the owner of goat shelter, the students came to know the situation of the goat shelter in Nuwakot. The goat shelter was not prospering economically because many of the baby goats were dying due to lack of care and protection.

The students after finding out the situation had an impactful discussion with the owner of the goat shelter. The students were curious to know how to help the owner and also brainstormed some ideas as to how the situation could be avoided in the future. After visiting the goat shelter, the student members returned back to the hotel and had an interactive session where they played various games.





# February 26th, 2017

On the fourth day of the program, the students were to visit the Trishuli hydro-power station with the annual output of 163 GWh. The power station has been in operation since commissioned around forty five years ago. As Nepal is one of the richest countries in fresh water resources and also uses hydropower for its maximum energy generation, the hydropower gave essential insights to the situation of the country.

Nepal has also been facing load-shedding for a couple of years due to insufficient energy generation and other technical reasons. This stands as one of the most critical issues for a developing country like Nepal which needs energy for every new development projects.



This issue was observed, addressed and conferred in the educational visit to the hydropower station. After the perceptive excursion to the hydro-power station, the students headed towards Pokhara which was the second destination for the exchange program. Pokhara city is the second largest city of Nepal located 175.5 km away from Nuwakot and is one of the most touristic sites of Nepal. After reaching the lakeside of Pokhara city, the students explored the scenic lake of the city and the tourist market of the area. The students sought out various activities and also bicycled around the 5.23 km<sup>2</sup> long Phewa lake.



# February 27th, 2017

On the fifth day of the exchange program, the students proceeded to Sikles, a Gurung village above the Mardi Khola (1,980m) overlooking Annapurna IV to the north and Annapurna II and Lamjung Himal to the east.

Sikles is renowned for its rich cultural practices and the home-stay it offers for any visitors. The students were to stay with the local people of Sikles for maximum cultural learning and exposure. After five hours drive to Sikles, the students settled down in their assigned homes and started preparing for an adventurous evening ahead.

The students from both Nepal and Japan had decided to cook the cuisine from the other's country for the evening. The students from Japan prepared "kheer" (rice pudding) and the students from Nepal prepared rice balls and yaki soba with the help of one another. The students enjoyed the meals prepared by one another and also sat together for a camp fire in the night.





# February 28th, 2017

On this day, the students had planned to have a cultural presentation at one of the local schools of Sikles. The students performed various cultural dances, songs and martial arts for the school children and the children also returned the favor by putting up a show for the students.

The Japanese student members performed 'soran bushi' for the school students which is one of the most famous traditional songs in Japan. One of the Japanese students also performed martial arts for the school students known as 'Aikido'. Similarly, Nepalese students had prepared various cultural performances such as cultural dance, songs and a speech.





## 1st March, 2017



The day started with the students hiking the hills of Sikles to watch the beautiful view of Annapurna range. The student members found an opportunity to explore one the potent tourist areas of Nepal which still needs to come on lime light.

Later in the day, the students conducted PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) with the community of Sikles. The student members visited the surrounding households and talked to the family members. They also gathered data about the social and economic aspect of the community by interviewing community members.

After they gathered data about the community, the student members sat together and had a meticulous discussion about the current situation of the community and how it could be improved. They also called upon a respectable figure of the community who was a teacher of the local school and again discussed the issues and the possible solutions for the community according to their perspective.



## 2nd March, 2017

The students were to travel back to Pokhara on this day. The community of Sikles bid farewell to the students in a traditional Gurung custom where they thanked the students by putting white tika on their forehead and a flower garland around their neck. After the farewell, the students traveled back to Pokhara enjoying the various scenic beauty and streams of the area. After they reached Pokhara in the evening, the students reveled in the nightlife of Lakeside, Pokhara and visited various tourist attraction sites.





# 3rd March, 2017

On this day, the student members had planned numerous activities in Shamrock school of Pokhara. The student members have been visiting and organizing various cultural exchange programs in the school for several years now. The activities and programs this time were to be much exceptional and unexpected for the students of Shamrock. The Japanese student members had prepared a presentation on the culture of Japan and other various unknown facts about Japan. This was to the utter delight of all the students as majority of the students had confirmed that they wanted to see a presentation about Japan when a survey was taken a few months back. The students were amazed when they saw a presentation on gender inequality in Japan and reported to have learned a lot from those sessions.

Except the informative presentations, there were an assortment of performances, activities and games aligned for the day. The students were given a challenge where they had to demonstrate their chopstick skills. The students competed in a game where they had to pick candies using chopsticks and the ones who could pick and place the highest number of candies in an allocated time were awarded with prizes.





The Nepalese students performed various songs and the students of Shamrock also showed their cultural performances. One of the Japanese student members again performed Japanese martial arts known as Aikido. He was also able to teach some moves to the students as well as to the principal of the school. The students seemed to have rejoiced all the activities throughout the day. The program ended with the school handing a token of love to A.A.E.E. for its continuous effort and support.

At the end of the day, the students had a chance to visit “Gandaki Association of the deaf” which is a non-government and non-profit organization dedicated to empowering the hearing-impaired people. Here, the students learned about the working of the organization and about deaf people in the context of Nepal. They also had the opportunity to learn about the language deaf people use and learned to say a few things in their language.





# 4th March, 2017

On this day, the students returned from Pokhara after completing many activities there. The student members shopped for various Nepali hand-made products in Thamel. Thamel is recognized as the most popular and which busiest tourist area of Kathmandu.



In the evening, the students sat together to enjoy a traditional Japanese meal in a Japanese restaurant. For many Nepalese student members, it was the first time trying Japanese cuisine and they liked it very much. The Japanese student members explained about every food item and their value in the Japanese culture.



## 5th March, 2017

This day was almost the last day for the student's exchange program. One of the Japanese student members had to leave the same day. Therefore, the students had planned to have a closing ceremony of the exchange program where they would share their experiences.

The students shared their experience and some beautiful memories which moved everyone to tears. Everybody repeated that they had created a friendship that would last over lifetime; the true essence of "Mero Sathi". The students also shared their learning through the exchange program.



They expressed that they had not only learned about each other's culture but also integral life lessons through this exchange program. After the experience sharing, the students were awarded with participation certificates from the coordinator of the program.

Last but not the least, a Sustainable Development Goals presentation competition had been organized in Kathmandu University, School of Arts by A.A.E.E. Nepal. The winning prize for the competition was NRS. 5000. Students from various universities and colleges of Kathmandu had applied to compete in the competition.





. Out of numerous applicants, 9 applicants were chosen to participate in the competition along with Mero Sathi members. The Nepali student members and Japanese student members were participating in two teams. While the Nepali student members were presenting on 'Climate action' which is the 13th goal, the Japanese student members presented on the 5th goal which is 'Gender equality'. The Japanese student members gave a perceptive presentation on the current gender inequality issue of Japan and proposed solutions for the same. The Nepalese student members talked about the various impacts of climate change in our world and made everyone aware about the steps they need to take for the future generation. The students were sharing their ideas, views and possibilities for the sustainable development goals. The competition saw eleven diverse presentations which provided a platform for the students to discuss and share their knowledge, ideas and views on sustainable development goals for a better world.

The competition was judged by three professors of Kathmandu University one of whom was the Dean of Kathmandu University, School of Arts. The presenters were given a total of 7 minutes to complete their presentation and three minutes were allocated for the judges to engage in a question/answer round with the participants.

The panel provided impactful insights and feedbacks to all the participants which made the program very interactive and pragmatic. While all the participants were equally competitive and gave excellent presentations, a team of two students from Kathmandu University, School of Arts won the competition and bagged the cash prize.





## 6th March, 2017

This was the last day of the student's exchange program and the day of final good-byes. The student members from Japan were returning to Japan in the afternoon. The student members shared gifts and souvenirs where they had written messages and notes for one another. The students were sad to be leaving but carried treasured memories with them.

# What did they learn?



The students learned about numerous things during the exchange program. The various team building exercises helped the students to get along with one another and understand the importance of working in a team. The students learned about each other's cultures and also to respect one another's culture at the same time.

When students visited places like the goat shelter in Nuwakot, they learned about the rural scenario of Nepal and how small holder agriculture and farming are the norm. They brainstormed about various ideas as to what can be done to promote the growth of various such local farmers.

The students went to Sikles and gained ideas about the local culture of Gurung community. Ethnic cultures and its importance were not only studied but the students got to experience it by living with the community members.



# What did they learn?



The students also participated in the Sustainable Development Goal's competition. This helped the students understand the international problems related to sustainable development. They created awareness regarding how sustainable goals are important and how they can be achieved.

As the students were from different nations, they had different experiences in their own lifetime. They got to share their views and perceptions about the same topic. This helped to broaden their knowledge and see things from each other's point of view. The importance of language and culture was also observed by all students.



Thank- You