



Report on Mero Sathi Project

By Nepalese Student members

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Introduction to Mero Sathi Project

Mero Sathi was a student exchange program organized by AAEE (Asian Association of Education and Exchange). This was a cultural exchange program between Japanese and Nepalese students. The program started from 13th February 2016 and ended on 24th February 2016. Seven Nepalese and Nine Japanese students participated in the program. The students were taken to Kathmandu, Nuwakot, Pokhara and Sikkim. During those twelve days, the students visited different places which are of socio-economic and cultural importance. They studied about the village-life of Nepal, studied about existing social problems like child labor and learned about conditions of families post-earthquake. There was also cultural study of Gurung community. The program was a good combination of education and enjoyment.

Aims and Objectives

- i) To show the support of Japanese students to Nepal post-earthquake.
- ii) To study about the socio-economic and cultural life of Nepalese.
- iii) To know about the existing social problems of Nepal.
- iv) To study sustainable development projects like goat-shelter as a source of income.
- v) To study about the culture of peculiar community of Nepal.
- vi) To know about the village life.
- vii) To share and compare the political, social, economic and cultural practices of Nepal and Japan.
- viii) To promote friendship.



Expectation before the program

Prior to attending the “Mero Sathi Project”, we were rather thrilled and totally excited. We knew that we were going to get a unique opportunity of interacting with Japanese friends. As Nepal and Japan have extremely close and friendly relations, we customarily attach highest importance to Japanese and specially their sense of dedication and discipline. At the same time, we were also wondering what will be the outcome of the event in the context of the fact that Nepal is a very backward country with lots of constraints. We were a bit hesitant too as we thought it may be quite difficult for Japanese to adjust to our conditions. So, we were anxiously waiting to welcome our Japanese friends with a mixture of curiosity and expectation.

We were quite aware that Japan is also a country in Asia and we share common oriental heritage. In many aspects, we also had a feeling that both Nepal and Japan have greatly been influenced by the tenets of Buddhism. Despite such similarities, we knew that there were some obvious differences relating to society and culture. Japan is one of the most developed countries of the world and is a world leader in terms of technological innovation. So, the main problem for us was how to adjust them to the Nepalese environment.

Food was another factor for us as there is a general paucity of materials that Japanese normally consume. Our main worry was how to make their stay in Nepal more comfortable and enjoyable.

Another matter of perpetual curiosity for us while awaiting the arrival of our Japanese friends was how could have Japan developed in such a short time. Though Japan lacked visible physical resources like oil and minerals, we had strong appreciation of the fact that Japan could make an optimum utilization of human resources and mastered both skills of management and technological innovation. We were very sure that we could very well adapt Japanese sense of dedication and discipline to enhance socio-economic transformation of our country.

Since the interactive program was focused on exchange of ideas on our respective culture and way of life, we were quite curious to know about the attitude of Japanese people towards life and also share our own perspective with them. As our society is still backward with various social evils and customs, we were quite keen to learn from them with a view to adapting their perceptions to our own needs.

Since this was going to be a new thing for us, we tried to learn as much as possible from our Japanese friends. Since Nuwakot district happened to be one of the two districts covered by the project, we were very keen to learn at first hand the devastations caused by April 25, 2015 earthquake in Nuwakot, one of the worst hit districts by the powerful tremor. We were also looking forward to have the first-hand experience of the project designed to uplift the standard of living of one family under the GOAT-SHELTER project.

To conclude, the project fully lived up to our expectations and we were very happy that we were able to clear and satisfy all our curiosities and queries after the successful completion of the program.

A brief summary of the daily activities

13th February 2016

The Mero Sathi Program officially started with the Nepalese members going to the airport to receive the Japanese members. The excited Nepalese members gave the equally excited Japanese members a traditional Nepali welcome. They put the red tika (abir) and gave khaad (a kind of shawl) to the Japanese members. During the afternoon tea at the hotel, proper introduction of the members were made. There was a brief visit to the Thamel area where the Japanese members were staying. The Japanese members exchanged their currency. The Nepalese members were busy sharing information about Nepal and the Japanese members were very excited to know about it. Friendship was building at every moment. However, as the Nepalese members were not staying at a hotel in Katmandu, they had to return back after meeting the Program Coordinator Mr. Kshitiz Bhattarai. Overall the first day was all about meeting and greeting.



14th February 2016

The main highlight of this day was visiting an NGO called CWISH and also visiting an orphanage. In the orphanage, the members learned about child domestic labor in Nepal and what organization like CWISH is doing to reduce it. The members were presented with the past and present statistics on child labor and they were also informed about various campaigns done to eliminate child labor. In the later part of the day, the members visited an orphanage where they interacted with the children there. There was singing, dancing and evening prayer.



15th February 2016

The members of Mero Sathi project visited the Swyambhunath temple (Monkey Temple). Apart from observing Katmandu from such a high altitude, they also learned about religious tolerance and culture of Nepal. The site was also damaged by Earthquake and the members made inquiries about that. Later, after shopping at the local department store, the members headed for Nuwakot. After about five hours bus ride, they reached Nuwakot at night. However, the most important highlight of the day was when Keita Ohira, a Japanese member surprised his best friend Mokey who had been staying in Nepal for the past three months. That was the ultimate friendship moment.



16th February

This was a very eventful day. After inspecting the local school damaged by the Earthquake, the members visited the Goat shelter. The Goat shelter project was funded by AAEE with the aim to promote local entrepreneurship post-earthquake. The shelter was constructed with bamboo and zinc. There were separate section for he-goats, she-goats and baby goats. The shelter was made at a higher level than the ground so that the droppings could be collected and turned into fertilizer for the crops. The goat shelter was different from any other goat shelter in the village. It was very modern, efficient and business oriented. It can be noted that such goat shelter can help the villagers in the long run as it is very much business-oriented. The members interacted with the owner of the goat shelter. After that the members were divided into groups and they interacted with the families who were affected by the earthquake. Later, the Nepalese members prepared Nepalese food: Kheer (Rice pudding) and Rajmaa server with Chiura (Kidney beans and beaten rice). Around the fire, they discussed about the goat shelter while cooking food at the same time.



17th February 2016

In the morning Japanese students made traditional Japanese food Rice Balls along with the Nepalese students and taught them how to make it. Then they left Nuwakot village and began their journey towards Pokhara.



18th February 2016

From the morning, students began to prepare themselves for the ride to Sikles which was off-road drive approximately of four hours. During the ride no one had a comfortable time but everyone was curious as they knew that something special was waiting for them. After getting to Sikles all the members got to know about the village and the different community of people living there.



19th February 2016

In the morning there was a short hike to the top of a hill to see the scenic beauty of Sikles where the members of the Mero Sathi took photographs and enjoyed the panoramic view of the mountains and hills. In the afternoon the student members attended Owl festival organized by the local people of Sikles which had been organized in Sikles for the first time. There the student members knew about the importance of conservation of owl and nature. Different competitions such as Bird watching, Thelo (stone throwing), Ghur ghumai (top spinning), Jhijhili(a traditional game which is about to be extinct), art competition based on owls and many more contest were held where participation of the locals was huge. Student members also participated in the festival and showed their dance which was highly appreciated by the audience.



20th February 2016

In the morning the student members interacted with the Gurung community of Sikles to learn about their culture, tradition and their living style and history of Sikles. After the interaction with the people of Sikles all the members left Sikles via the same road that they had used earlier to get there. The travel was same as before. All the students were very relaxed as they could live their city life again when they arrived in Pokhara. In the afternoon student members roamed around the city and in the evening there was dinner along with live music which everyone enjoyed.



21st February 2016

The program started with sports activities in Gyanodaya Boarding School (SHAMROCK). The member of Mero Sathi organized different types of sports for the student and all the members. They were divided into four groups and played four games like football, relay race etc. In the later part of the day, members were given leisure time for shopping, wandering around or resting as their wish. At the end of the day the member went to SHAMROCK and distribute prize to winning groups.

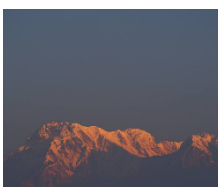


22nd February 2016

The members of Mero Sathi visited Sarangkot early morning to see the sunrise. After having breakfast the members travelled back to Kathmandu by bus.

23rd February 2016

It was the 2nd last day of program. After having breakfast the member visited at Radio



Kantipur for interview about Mero Sathi program. All the Nepalese members and three Japanese members were interviewed. At the day time, short discussion was made about the whole program. During afternoon, the Japanese members bought souvenirs from the local market of Thamel. After having last dinner there was certificate distribution program as well as thank you speeches.

24th February 2016

It was the last day of program. All the members were emotional that day. At the early morning the member enjoyed the last breakfast with each other. At the breakfast the Japanese members gave gifts to all the Nepalese member. After having breakfast all the members went to airport to say good bye to Japanese member. The Mero Sathi project of February officially ended with tears and goodbyes.



What did we learn from the exchange program?

"Mero Sathi" cultural exchange program was beneficial to students at various levels. It did not only help the students to get knowledge about one another's country's major aspects but also it helped us learn different things on a personal level; which with no doubt will help us grow into a civilized and a better human being. We Nepalese students learned that how prioritizing to appreciate every little thing in life helps maintain healthy environment around us. Similarly, it is the way Japanese students interacted with one another and us; helped us realize that the energy we Nepalese people have, if utilized in a different way, can help us achieve progress and development (May it be in any sector of life). Meanwhile, the respect that Japanese students show towards time is something that we learned and wish to follow for the rest of our lives. Their punctuality is a message that the one, who respects time, is the one who succeeds (Japan being an example of success). This principle is important to everyone but mostly to the students as we are the one who are willing to work for the betterment of present and future. Also, being able to visit rural places of Nepal (Nuwakot and Sikles) helped us learn about geographical, political, educational, lifestyle, sanitation related issues of those places. It helped us in increasing knowledge about our own country and has surely helped in our studies as well. Along with this, we also acquired knowledge about another country (Japan) and people there. As a student this program was very beneficial for us, as it helped us realize our potential and capabilities to bring positive changes. But first, it helped us see the changes that we need to bring in ourselves to become a better person.

This student's exchange program not only gave an opportunity for students to share and exchange one another's culture but also gave a room to explore various communities of Nepal. The students from Nepal as well as Japan got to explore the communities which they were not familiar of and which hadn't travelled before. Community visits brought the students more close to the social, cultural and economic life of common Nepalese. They got to visit two communities; Nuwakot inhabited by the Brahmin community and Sikles inhabited by the Gurung Community. The student members got an opportunity to learn about their hardships and struggles. Similarly, a common question that was in the mouth of Japanese student member that was, "How do Nepalese afford to smile even in the worst situations of their lives?" was answered during their visit to the community. The interaction would also not have been possible if the community members hadn't cooperated with the student members.

The community visits also helped the student members to broaden their knowledge regarding caste and ethnic groups in Nepal, their culture and simultaneously their way of life. In,

a nutshell, we can say that the activities done in the community have contributed to understand the community people, their problem, their way of lives, and their attitude towards life for vividly.

The whole program wouldn't have been possible without collaboration and cooperation from the student members, coordinators, community members and all the people who have been part of the project, starting from driver to the RJ. Nepalese students were inquisitive about the behavior of Japanese, their taste and way of life. We were also worried if we couldn't reflect our culture properly in front of Japanese in the cultural festival in Sikles. Nevertheless as the saying goes, "Nothing is Impossible", Nepalese members tried their level best to reflect the Nepali culture through dance and singing. Similarly, when we went for community visits, we were also worried if we could get factual answers from the people and also if they would share their stories with us. Fortunately, with open heart they willingly shared their stories to us and also the Japanese and Nepalese student members put forwarded the interviewee with many interesting questions. Nepalese students also acted like a translator to Japanese students so that their queries could be answered by the household members. This way the interaction between the Japanese and Nepalese student member also improved for better.

Talking about the benefits of "Mero Sathi project- 2016", the experience was wonderful. Some important lessons learnt from the Japanese group were to be punctual, be polite and be sober. Such programs have made it possible to experience and learn new culture even without leaving one's homeland. So it's been a great opportunity for Nepali student members to know about Japan, its people and culture without even leaving Nepal. Such participation is indeed necessary to broaden the knowledge and perspective about other foreign countries, make new friends from different parts of the world and live each other's lives. So as a whole this program will benefit us in a long run.



Conclusion and Recommendation

For many of us, student exchange programs like Mero Sathi exchange Program is a new concept. So many of us were anxious before starting the Program but now everyone is happy to be a part of it. We had the times of our lives during the Program. From learning so many new things about Nepal and Japan to making new friends, our objective for being a part of the Program is fulfilled. We thank AAEE and everyone involved make making our journey so amazing and memorable. Programs like this should be conducted time and again. Thank you everyone!

Well the whole program was excellent but nothing is picture perfect. May be there were something missing that would make this exchange program more perfect. The program was held in Nepal and there were many travelling to different parts of Nepal. Nepalese members got to know little about Japan, so it would have been better if there was enough sharing from Japanese members too. If there was enough sharing from Japanese members then Nepalese members can also compare the things that of Nepal and Japan. And next thing as it was a culture exchange program, it would have been better if Nepalese members performed in Japanese song and the Japanese members in Nepali song. It would further help in sharing each other's culture. For next time, it would be really great if the information about such project would spread to a wider range of students, especially in Nepal. Our ultimate hope is that one day the Mero Sathi exchange Program would be held in Japan.

Thank You Everyone!

