

The Spectacle



The Journey at the IISE Continues

Three months have gone by since we brought out the first edition of the Spectacle. So much has happened at the IISE since then! As part of the curriculum, participants produced radio plays focussing on cultural taboos. We saw the participants manage their budgets, their time and for the first time at IISE, we catalysts charged them for consulting and lending our voice for recordings. The scenes of teams taking turns at the sound studio irrespective of day or night and participants looking drowsy at breakfast due to lack of sleep created a sense of something imminent. And what a show

it was when the radio plays were aired!

The participants then moved on to Act 3 in our journey in five acts, where they were divided into groups working on real projects for which they would be the founding teams. It is amazing to see many of them much more mature and realistic in their approach to problem solving when faced with real life situations. Words like measurements of success and needs study now roll off their tongues as smoothly as kerala paratta!

As the culmination of Act 3, for the first time participants held presentations on their findings outside the IISE.

The tension during the days leading towards this big event was palpable when the teams rehearsed over and over again. The results were for all to see. The audience raised many crucial questions and gave many valuable suggestions.

We hope you will enjoy this second edition of "The Spectacle".

Murali Nair

IISE Catalyst

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IISE Happenings

Jayne Waithera
(Participant from Kenya)

Painful Fun

Having grown up in a black dominated society, it is my first time to be in an institute with international representation. There are people of different races and colors, speaking different languages. Our institute has twenty participants from fourteen different countries but when you find us in the campus you would think we are brothers and sisters. We live like one people in one universe, an aspect that makes IISE unique.

Life is not a bed of roses here. We wake up at 6 o'clock, head for sessions which are very interesting and practically oriented. The hot sun and high humidity accompanied by frequent power cuts can make life a bit miserable sometimes.

All the activities are very interesting but the most memorable one is the Tansalesia case study. Tansalesia was an imaginary country where blind people are recognized neither by the citizens nor by the government officials. We were all divided into four groups and in this division we were supposed to be Simon, a blind Tansalee who was lucky to have education and Jenny, his counterpart who was from Holland and decided to help Simon in realizing his dream.

This started quite well in the beginning while we were brainstorming. Sooner than we could realize, time was not waiting for us. We had to interview different people, some of whom gave relevant and useful information, but others, especially the government officials including the governor wanted the people to believe that there were no blind people in Tansalesia.

Through the needs study we became

aware that there was a big need for supporting blind people in the mountainous area. So we decided to start a social project. We laid out our project plan, wrote proposals, applied to donors, prepared our financial plan, and finally started our project establishment.



Jayne Waithera

As it happens in the real situation, we had to purchase a piece of land from Mr. Mani who was Simon's uncle. We did all the land negotiations, even paid for the land and a few days after our final payment, we got a notice from the government that Mr. Mani's land was not registered. When we went back to his secretary she told us that Mr. Mani was sick in hospital and she could do nothing. We were so frustrated but later we managed to get a meeting with the mayor and the district collector. Unfortunately before the end of the meeting Mr. Green, the owner of the neighboring piece of land, appeared claiming that part of the land we bought was his and he had all the legal documents. Coincidentally Mr. Mani went to a world of no return at the same time.

Poor us, we were so frustrated with the pressure working on us, but we finally made it for the project fair. It was a painful experience but a sweet one.

A radio show about the Tansalesian experience can be heard under the following link:

Mohamed Salia

(Participant from Sierra Leone)

Using Radio Plays to Bring About Social Change

We the participants at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs truly believe that we can use radio plays to bring about social change in a society, especially in the case of certain harmful traditional practices like Female Genital Mutilation, discrimination within the caste system, killing of albinos with the belief of making one rich, eating disorders, and racial discrimination. So our whole radio play production in the second part of our training program was focused on change. We are not against any good traditional practices, but we want to see that those practices within traditions that are harmful to human beings are stopped.

We started with a training from Karo, a catalyst who came to our center from the United States to teach us about cultural taboos. She taught us about many harmful traditional practices existing in various societies and the possible methods we can use to address these taboos. After four weeks of extensive training we had to put into practice what we have learned by preparing a radio play ourselves which we can use as a form of advocacy against these harmful practices when we return back home.

We had to write short stories based on cultural taboos in our home countries and how to break them. Thereafter, five short stories were selected to be converted into radio play scripts which were used to produce 30 minute radio plays. Every team of four had to work within a fixed budget to produce the radio play. By doing so, we had to account for everything that we spent. For instance,

we had to pay for the sound studio, recording devices, hiring actors, and even paying for music that we used in the play. All this was done using the imaginary IISE currency (Dosa). I must say for three weeks we had to work on a very tight budget as each team was given only 5000 Dosas to produce their radio play, which of course was not enough. So we had to plan our budget very well in order to be able to produce the play at the end. Working at night was also another challenge for us. Since we were having only one studio for all five teams the days were not long enough, so we had to pay extra for night time work on our production. Sometimes we worked until 3 in the morning cutting, editing and mixing.

Though it was a challenging process throughout these weeks, we were able to learn a lot, for example how to work in a group, write scripts, direct and edit plays, and most importantly how to use a sound studio. The result; five quality home produced radio plays.

The first radio play titled the "Riddle Remained Unsolved" was written and directed by Jessica Schroeder, a participant from Germany. The main theme in this radio play touched on discrimination against foreigners, the social problems leading towards racial discrimination, and possible ways of addressing this social taboo.

The second radio play was titled "The Lake", written and directed by Karin Broeske, a participant from Norway. Her story focuses on eating disorders as a form of cultural taboo in many developed countries. It explains the consequences of eating disorders and how to deal with people affected by them.

The third radio play covered discrimination based on caste and societal status. It was titled "The Water", written and directed by Khom Sharma, a participant from Nepal.



Audience at the IISE Radio Festival

The central theme of this radio play was the negative effects of discrimination due to a caste system and what can be done to address this taboo.

The fourth radio play was titled "The Endangered Species", written and directed by a participant from Kenya, Jayne Waithera. The play focused on the killing and mutilation of albinos by witch-doctors across Africa based on the belief that owning albino body parts will make them rich or bring supernatural power. The play brings about an idea of what we can do to help stop this inhuman practice. The final radio play was "The Escape", written and directed by me, Mohamed Salia, a participant from Sierra Leone. My play was centered on Female Genital Circumcision (or FGM). The story projects the problems women face in their societies if they refuse to be circumcised, and what are the negative consequences if they do get circumcised. The play also brings forward solutions on how to address this taboo.

At the end of the seven weeks we had a big radio play festival where every group presented their radio play to people from all walks of life. Amongst the audience were journalists, business professionals, artists, community leaders, and social entrepreneurs who listened to the radio plays. All external guests evaluated the radio plays on different categories such as casting, editing and directing, music and sounds, story line and script.

These plays will be published on the Internet and on CDs and we hope we will be able to influence social change!

Kyila (Participant from Tibet)

Act Three

Act three is one of my favourite acts as we are working on actual future projects of Braille Without Borders in Kerala. We started act three on June 9th and everyone was very excited. There are three groups working on three different projects. Group A is working on the establishment of a preparatory school, similar to the one that we have in Tibet. Group B is creating a technology resource center, and group C is working on a webpage for the blind and partially sighted worldwide, including a micro finance program.



Kyila

I chose to join the project that deals with the setup of a preparatory school because this is something related to my own vision of setting up a kindergarten for blind pre-school kids in Tibet. I am sure that during these seven weeks I will gain lots of experience. When we were conducting our needs study, most of the time we were out visiting main stream schools where blind children are integrated, blind organisations, and a preparatory school for children who are hearing impaired. We had our first

interview with Mr Manoj from the National Association for the Blind (NAB) and it went very well. He answered our questions and shared his experience working with blind people. He was very open to all our questions and took us very seriously and spent more than an hour with us. It was my first time to do real interviews for a needs study and I was very nervous initially, but we all had a wonderful session at the IISE to prepare ourselves for the interviews.

For our interviews we were always accompanied by Tiffany, a blind college graduate working at the IISE, who is fluent in both English and Malayalam.

We went to a main stream school called Cotton Hill School for girls only and interviewed resource teachers, blind and partially sighted students, and their sighted school mates.

We all sat down in a big room, which is their resource room, and Tiffany introduced us to the resource teacher. Interviewing in this school was quite challenging. The room was filled with people, there were other teachers and students coming in and going out, and children looking at us through the windows. Our plan was to do individual interviews, but there were many people around us and it would not have been polite to ask others to leave the room. When we conducted the interviews with the students, I had the feeling that they were not so comfortable to answer some of the questions because the teachers were everywhere. Sometimes the resource teacher was interrupting the students: "Answer this, no that is not correct." which made the whole situation at times quite tense. We wanted to talk to some of the blind and partially sighted students after the interview, but because of the language barrier, we could not communicate with them. To my surprise, there was a big difference between the girls school and the boys school. The

blind and partially sighted boys were much more confident and even spoke English better than their sighted friends. When we asked the blind and partially sighted students about their challenges, they told us that the most difficult challenges they are facing are maths, chemistry and science.

We had a discussion with the resource teacher at the boys school about mobility and we asked them why most of the blind children do not use canes. The answer was that there is a difference between boys and girls. They told us that girls do not use the cane to walk around because they are very shy. Many of the boys use canes. But we have Tiffany, who always uses a cane, as a role model to explain more to the girls about the importance of using it.

Our group is rather small but a great team of five people and two catalysts. We really enjoyed our field trips, although sometimes it was very tiring to do interviews for hours, to meet new people, and to deal with the language barrier, but as a team we faced all those challenges. Tiffany was a great interpreter and we all appreciated her input. She was proud herself to explain what she is doing and to explain the concept of the IISE.

Every Friday in act three, each group holds a presentation on what they achieved during the week and gives an update to the rest of the participants. But in addition to that, we also work on our speech, voice projection, and body language. Last Friday, our group divided the presentation, so that each of us had a different task to present. For example, I talked about the parents and sighted teachers we interviewed. After our presentations, we all got feedback from the catalysts, and as for me, I am always happy to receive feedback so that I really know where I have to improve. I must say

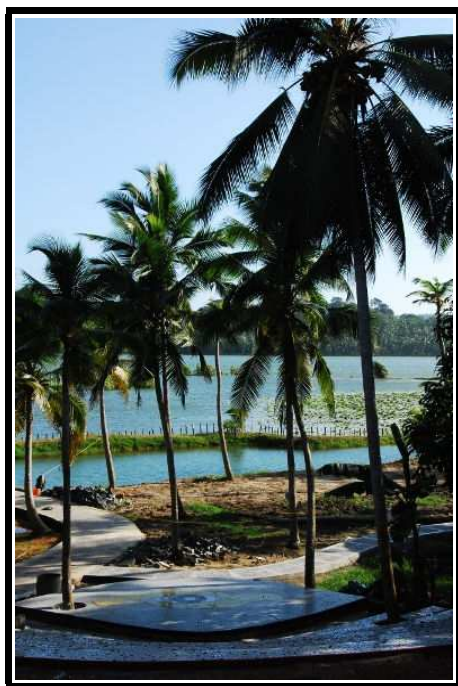
it was not easy to receive feedback the first time, but once you get used to it, it is the best way to learn how to improve yourself.

Life at IISE

Karin Broeske
(Participant from Norway)

How I Became an IISE Participant

It is Sunday morning and I am sitting in the auditorium of the IISE. A refreshing breeze is blowing in. It is a wonderful morning here in the very south of India. I want to tell you how I ended up in this nice place. It all started about one year and six months back.



View from the IISE auditorium

It was a cold November afternoon in Norway. The wind was howling outside the walls of my parents' house where I was sitting on my computer. I could hear the snowflakes beating against the windows. It was a typical Norwegian winter day. I was thinking about what I wanted to do with my life. For a long time

I had a dream of starting a social project to help other people, but how in the world could I do that? I did not have the knowledge required for this kind of work.

I heard a soft pling from my computer. I just received a new email. The subject line of the email read: International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs is looking for motivated visionaries. It immediately caught my attention. With growing excitement I opened the email and started to read. I read about the IISE, their basic values and goals and best of all, they were looking for participants for their first year of operation. In the bottom of the email it said: If you are interested, please fill in the attached application form.

“This is something for me!” I exclaimed.

I went to the kitchen where I made myself a big mug of coffee. I had the feeling that I would be busy on the computer for the rest of that afternoon and therefore I needed coffee. I opened the attachment and started to fill in the application form right away. The first questions were fairly easy. They wanted to know personal details such as name, address, country of residence etc. This is no big deal I thought to myself. Then it started to get more complicated. I got questions like: Tell us about your future vision and what can you contribute to the IISE. I took a lot of time answering all the questions in the form, because I wanted to make sure I made my answers as truthful and good as possible.

That night I did not sleep much because I was thinking how much I wanted to become a participant at the IISE!

During the next couple of months I was thinking a lot about the application form. I was quite nervous. Would they accept me? Was I good enough to attend the course? These questions were rumbling around in my mind.

Then in February I got a phone call out of the blue. It was from the IISE! They

wanted to talk to me. I got many questions that I answered as well as I could. When I finished the phone call I had a really good feeling. The conversation on the phone was so positive. I called my mother and told her all about it. "So you are going to India?" she said in a nervous voice. "Yes, I think so" I replied happily.

Then in June I got the final answer. I had been accepted as a participant in the first year of the IISE! I could not believe what I heard. Finally my dream would become reality. I could start my social project. It was one of the happiest days of my life.

There were quite a few things that had to be done before I could board the plane to India such as health check ups, vaccinations, visa applications. I sent the papers including my passport to the Indian embassy in Oslo two weeks before Christmas. I waited in great anticipation. What if I did not get it back in time, what if my passport got lost somewhere in the mail? The papers including the passport with the one year student visa arrived on Christmas Eve. It was the best Christmas gift I could dream of. A week before I had received my air tickets from the IISE. I was ready to take off. I had a wonderful Christmas with my family and friends.

The day before my departure a big snowstorm hit Norway. My father had volunteered to drive me to the airport a day before and sleep over in a hotel the last night. We were worried that the snow storm could delay us a lot. It took us twice as long as usual to drive to the airport. Late at night we arrived at the hotel and went right to bed. Early next morning the snowstorm was still very bad. How happy I was to have gone to the airport one day early. Everything went smoothly. Finally I was on my way to India!

So here I am at the IISE. I am very happy

that I chose to fill in the application form on that cold November day in Norway. If not I wouldn't be able to attend this course and learn what I need to start up my social project. But I must admit that sometimes I wish we could get a snow storm here, because the very south of India can be too hot at times.

Mohamed Salia
(Participant from Sierra Leone)

Beyond my Dreams

Making a final decision to leave my family, friends and loved ones for one year to come to the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) in India was not an easy decision. Especially because I had always thought, no matter how beautiful the course will turn out to be, to live among different cultures and in a foreign land for one year, life was going to be very challenging for me!

This is my first time ever to embark on such an adventure. It has been four months since I arrived in the IISE and started my course together with 20 other motivated and promising participants from different parts of the world. And you know what? Life on campus with this IISE family has turned out to be more positively challenging in both academic and social life than I had ever expected in my wildest imagination. Every day is like jumping into a new world full of experiences and excitement!

One interesting aspect I love about this training is that, it is not like school or university where you always sit in a classroom, listen to teachers or lecturers and write in note books. NO... Here, apart from our well-designed classrooms, we take classes everywhere around our spacious and environmentally-friendly campus. Sometimes, for example, we attend classes at the lake side (just at the

backyard of our campus). Interestingly, these classes are full of interactions between all participants which creates a positive learning atmosphere.



Mohamed Salia

Another unique aspect of the IISE training is that the training curriculum is mainly designed to prepare participants on how to overcome real life challenges in the real world when starting their own social projects--for example, how to write project proposals, search for donors, overcome fear of public speaking, and how to build a true team. This type of training is part of our everyday academic life on campus both in sessions, group work, and research. One of the first project management lessons that opened our minds to the practical aspect of the real world was the 'Tansalesian' case study.

Tansalesia is an imaginative country where different groups of participants had to start their own social project. They face real life situations such as corruption, problems with neighbors, land/tax issues and everything that makes the lives of social entrepreneurs difficult. So we had to do our needs study, write a proposal, plan the budget, campaign, and do a public speech. At the end of the 14 weeks we had a big project fair where every group presented their project.

Apart from our busy academic work schedules in week days, weekends are reserved for us to stretch our bodies and

visit friends. On Saturdays, for example, most participants visit foster friends who take them to different places in Trivandrum, like national parks, historic sites or supermarkets etc. Other participants spend the day boating in our campus boats and swimming in our cute little lake.

The IISE experience so far in these first four months, I must say is beyond my dreams! And I found it positively challenging! I hope one day other motivated participants who see themselves as ambassadors of change will have such an unique opportunity to be trained here to make a positive change.

Hussni Bugis

(Participant from Saudi Arabia)

Being the Oldest Participant

After four weeks of starting the course at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE), photos of some participants, few shots of the project site, and a couple of scenarios of activities inside the Institute were uploaded to the IISE web site by the administration team of Braille Without Borders (BWB). Delightfully, I e-mailed the link to my family for them to enjoy pictures of me and my new friends. The next day my wife called me from Saudi Arabia and told me to return back home immediately. From the pictures she had seen on the web site I looked older than anyone else. She said "All participants are much younger than you. They are the same age as your sons. It is just not right for you to be among them".

Frankly, I had a very crucial conversation with her, and I think she was a bit jealous of me being among young girls. I had to convince her that she has to trust me as I trust her. Our beliefs as being a true Moslem family should induce us to keep

our marriage blissful. Our 25 years of marriage would drive us to care for each other. The fact of me being in India should not jeopardize our marriage and "I really love her very much and I missed her a lot" as I told her. Also, I explained to her that the difference in age compared to the other participants in the IISE does not make any difference because we all come from different countries, cultures, and religions. But we all have a common goal to become successful social entrepreneurs when we return home. Each one of us has his or her own dream to work for and set up a social project when we return home in December. I told her that it is my commitment as a visually impaired person to finish the course and gain the experience and the knowledge that I need to make changes towards the better for visually impaired people in Saudi Arabia.

Being the oldest among the IISE family, I must admit that at the beginning I felt quite isolated from the others. I had gotten the impression from most of them that probably I was not entirely accepted because I am much older than them. I had to break the ice between myself and each participant individually to feel accepted. Fortunately, after five months in the IISE, I think that I have gained respect from most of my fellow participants and the catalyts. It is just so great to feel being accepted, admitted and cared for. It reached a point when some participants started calling me "Daddy", "Papa", or some even call me "Father". I gratefully cherish every single one of my IISE family. I really hope all participants and catalyts feel the same way towards me. My IISE family feels like a real family to me because in reality I have a large family and many members of my own family are of the same age as most of the participants. However, I am looking forward to my family visiting me in Trivandrum by the end of July, so they

can meet all members of my IISE family in Kerala.



Hussni Bugis

Truthfully, I am just so honored to be among the brilliant visionaries of the pioneer group of IISE participants and catalyts. For the rest of my remaining life, I believe that my friendship with my IISE family will grow even stronger, and become as firm and solid as a mountain.

Sahr Yillia (Participant from Liberia)

My Dream Becoming True

When I first heard the name Braille Without Borders (BWB) from a friend, all I knew of this organisation was about teaching blind and partially sighted people Braille, reading and writing. Another thought that came to my mind was about printing and distributing Braille books around the world. Since my friend was unable to tell me more about this organisation, I decided to search for BWB with the idea of having them as partners for the teaching of Braille and providing Braille books to Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa.

Well, getting in touch with BWB through their website on the Internet brought great signs of relief for me as I was amazed by some of the great projects they are running around the world. The most interesting one for me was their newly established project that is called the

International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) in India. This project invites young potential social entrepreneurs from around the world to come to India for an intensive 11-months training in various areas of entrepreneurship such as project planning, management, fundraising, computer with adaptive technology, communication, and leadership skills.

I am today proud to be among the first generation of trainees at the above institution. People come from Africa as well as many other parts of the world, including Asia, Europe, South America. With the state of the art equipment, high-quality training and encouragement we receive from our dynamic administration and catalysts, I have now been able to clearly understand that social entrepreneurship is the process of recognizing and resourcefully pursuing opportunities to create social values.

As a social entrepreneur in training, I feel greatly motivated and challenged by the above opportunities and resources to undertake innovative approaches in addressing critical needs of society, especially on the African continent.

I have the vision of establishing a non-governmental, non-profit organisation which is called CHILD RESCUE MISSION (CRM). CRM's mission will be to rescue young underprivileged persons from extreme poverty and illiteracy in post-war Sierra Leone and Liberia. I will develop and implement strategies that are result-oriented such as the establishment of a rescue village. This village will provide basic, quality tuition, free educational opportunities to the above-mentioned beneficiaries who will learn and develop new skills in different areas of social importance. In view of the above, the beneficiaries in turn will be able to maximise their social impact in their families, communities and the nation, as

well as the world. On this note, I would like to invite you all to visit <http://orgs.tigweb.org/38159> where you

can get more detailed information about my vision. As a strong believer in social change driven by the forces of creativity and innovation, I will always refuse to remain silent. I will stand firm to question the status quo, thereby exploiting the best opportunities in order to make the African continent a better place to live for young persons, starting with those two nations in West Africa. Please join me in making this vision come true.



Sahr Yillia

Beyond IISE

Hussni Bugis

(Participant from Saudi Arabia)

A new Job Opportunity for the Visually Impaired

My foster friend Mr. Raju is a CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the Sea View company in Techno Park in Trivandrum. His company mainly deals with documenting medical transcript from health sectors such as hospitals, health insurance companies, clinics in the United States, United Kingdom and some of the Gulf countries.

After a month, Mr. Raju invited me and Johnson to visit him. He wanted to show us how his company works. During the

visit, I found out that the type of jobs could easily be performed by blind people or partially sighted as well, if they are provided with correct training.

Sea View mainly trains people who are very good in using computers and have very good typing skills. They document a recorded medical transcript that has been received electronically through a device called dicta-phone. They then send the data back to the same source within 24 to 48 hours. Usually these transcripts are made by doctors where they describe their cases and need reports to be presented to the patients or other sectors and to be placed in the patient's file. I suggested Mr. Raju to have all the IISE participants to come and visit this place because I thought it would be very interesting for visually impaired to see how they can adapt themselves to these types of jobs. This job mainly needs the workers to listen very carefully to what the doctor has spoken on tape to deliver a transcript. There is a four to six months training course on medical terminology before starting the job.

All the participants who saw what has been done in this company could imagine that this would be a great job opportunity for blind and partially sighted computer users, in fact Amjad Prawej, one of our catalysts, experienced a similar working environment in Bangalore. In my opinion blind transcribers could easily compete with their sighted colleagues.

Cultural Taboos

Jayne Waithera
(Participant from Kenya)

Culture Renaissance

Having been brought up in a rural village in Central Kenya where traditions, taboos and superstitions are deep-rooted, I must

admit that at first I was nervous and shocked when one of the main topics at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs was "TABOOS". The word "taboos" could be defined as practices that are forbidden or not allowed in a particular society, tribe, religion, family, village or community. These practices have been adopted by the forefathers of a particular society over a long period of time. People have observed these practices from generation to generation. Breaking a taboo usually leads to severe punishment or penalties by local customs or by rule of law. Some major punishment given to taboo breakers include ex-communication, fine, death penalty, and many others.

The discussions went on well. Participants and catalysts shared their interpretation of taboos, as well as examples from their different cultural backgrounds. We also talked about how to break taboos without causing violence. When it was my turn I was shaking like a leaf, since I grew up being told we should neither talk about our taboos to other people nor break them. I gained courage and talked of a taboo that directly affects me and my condition of albinism.

In most parts of Africa it is a taboo or a curse to give birth to an albino. Some people believe that having an albino is the result of bewitchment in a family. Albinos are only fit to become sacrifices to the gods. In some instances albino infants are immediately killed at birth by the mid wives. Others think albinos are kind of ghost-like creatures. Some don't even dare to touch albinos, believing that their color is contagious. A factor that could be contributing to this belief in East Africa is the Kiswahili word for albino, "Zeru Zeru", which means "ghost-like creature".

Later, we were supposed to write a short story about taboos that we would like to break and I had a great passion to write

about several albinism-related taboos and superstitions. This is because my fellow African albinos and I are subject to social discrimination, stigma, rejection, mockery, and considered to be outcasts or a bad omen to society. Discrimination against albinos is a serious problem throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but recently in Tanzania it has taken a wicked twist: more than 150 albinos (BBC NEWS REPORT), including children, have been killed and mutilated in the past year, victims of what government officials in Africa say is a growing criminal trade in albino body parts. Our dead and mutilated bodies are being used by witch doctors for money-spinning juju, power accelerators, love, long life, fame and success potions. Further findings show that witch doctors are now marketing albino skin, bones and hair as ingredients in portions that are promised to make people rich. Most albinos and parents of albinos throughout Africa live under the fear of their child being kidnapped.

Many people in Tanzania and across Africa for that matter believe albinos have magical powers. They stand out, often the lone white face in a black crowd, a result of a genetic condition that impairs normal skin pigmentation and strikes about 1 in 3,000 people here. The inhuman practice has now spread to other countries, e.g. Kenya, Congo, and Burundi. (I should add that 70% of albino children in Africa are either abandoned by their parents or are raised by grandparents).

In answer to my assignment at the IISE, I wrote a short story about the taboos of albinism in Kenya, and the next stage of the assignment was to convert the short story into a radio play which has been streamlined in the BWB website. The story is entitled "Endangered Species", a story about an albino woman who had lost her twin sister, maybe to a greedy witch doctor.

To me, I really see it as part of my dream come true since it is a great way to create public awareness and sensitization, especially in Africa. The recent bizarre killings of albinos in Tanzania, Burundi and Kenya is an evident manifestation of the underlying problem. There is therefore a great need to address the lack of awareness among the various communities in Africa if any progress is to be realized.



Jayne Waithera

I had always been told "don't point fingers at witch doctors" and am left wondering for how long we shall watch innocents dying in silence. And the answer is "for as long as the forbidding laws of our forefathers exist". Therefore, we need an urgent reconsideration of our traditions. But the big question still remains why these beliefs, traditions, superstitions and taboos still exist. Is it an issue of power, superiority or poverty? Is knowing that you are "societally better" than another person because you happened to be born of a particular lineage, race and community key to the problem? Or does it go deeper?

Another question is how to eradicate this culture. We are trying our best to change people's mentality by staging plays, movies, radio shows, workshops and petitions about such scenarios, but personally I think the culture can only change by establishing a compensatory

culture. One that appreciates and rewards humanity and the dignity of mankind and hard work, and that punishes laziness and other social evils rightfully. A culture in which people have to do for themselves, rely on facts and other truths rather than depend on what their lineage is or what their forefathers or mothers had done. A system in which people are free to do whatever they want, because they like it and it is right. A system in which people are no longer judged by what their forefathers did and are accepted as part of the nation. A system that sees beyond the differences we may have. In life, the biggest achievement I would love to have is imparting the knowledge to people that we are all equal regardless of our color, culture, tribe, race, abilities and disabilities.

Karin Broeske
(Participant from Norway)

Eating Disorders

Imagine yourself sitting at the dinner table with your family or friends. You have a plate with nice food in front of you, but you cannot eat it. Then imagine people around the table wondering why you do not eat your food, but you cannot or do not want to talk about it. This is the situation that many people with an eating disorder face every day.

An eating disorder is a change in the regular eating pattern of a person. One can overeat, or one can eat too little or even stop eating. There are different types of eating disorders, but common to all of them is that they are a serious illness and in many cases it is not easy to talk about it because of cultural taboos. The reasons why someone develops an eating disorder differs from person to person.

It may be because of family problems, pressure to look good, pressure to have

the best grades at school etc. It affects a person both physically and psychologically. A lot of people worldwide get eating disorders, but in cultures where body image and weight loss is of importance, they are more common. The biggest group of people getting an eating disorder are young women at the age between 13 and 25.

Sometime back here in the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) we were asked to write short stories about cultural taboos. I got so excited. How great it was to get the chance to talk openly about a taboo. Since I have personal experiences with an eating disorder, I decided to write my short story about it. All the participants wrote a short story about a cultural taboo. We were divided into groups of four participants in each group and we had to choose a short story within our group. The story that was chosen was going to be the basis for a radio play. My group agreed on using my short story. What an opportunity, was the first thought that came to my mind when I heard that the rest of my group liked the story. I had a dream of going out in society and talking about eating disorders. Only when we talk about it, things can be changed and people will become aware that eating disorders exist. With a lot of determination and motivation we set off on our journey to complete the radio play. There were several steps we had to take. The short story had to be turned into a manuscript that could suit the radio play genre. Every character had to get dialogues, and we had to change some of the scenes to make it sound better. We spent hours on writing the dialogues for each character, and to think about which sounds and backgrounds we wanted to use in each scene. When that was done the story looked quite different from the original short story. I was very happy with the result.

We had to find actors for every character. We did a casting and listened to different actors for each role. We wanted the voice of the actor to be as close as possible to how we imagined the character to be. Then we went around with a recording device to record sounds. Among other things we needed sounds of water, sounds of a closing car door, and sounds of birds.



Hussni Bugis, Karin Broeske

When all the recording and collecting of sounds was done we started with the big task of putting it all together. For me that was the most challenging and exciting part of making the radio play. We spent day and night in the sound studio. One night, my group was there until 2.30 in the morning. Despite the hard work the mood was great and everyone seemed to be so excited about the result, "The Deep Lake", a story about a woman that suffers from an eating disorder. It was fun to see how our ideas turned into sounds and dialogues. Two days before the deadline our computer in the sound studio broke down. Everyone including me was sitting and walking around wondering what to do. We really needed that computer to function in order to finish our radio play. Thanks to the great staff at the IISE the computer was fixed again some hours later, and we could resume our work. Our radio play was finished one day before the radio play festival.

During the making of our radio play we experienced a lot of solidarity in our group

and between the groups. We brought each other coffee when we got tired, we helped each other in the sound studio, we encouraged each other with nice compliments, and above it all we had a lot of fun.

I think the most important thing we accomplished through the radio plays was that we turned bad cultural taboos into great pieces of art. These pieces of art will spread awareness about the taboos and I believe it will bring change to the society. My dream is that those who listen to our radio play will positively change the way they look at people who have eating disorders.

*Khom Raj Sharma
(Participant from Nepal)*

Caste Discrimination in Nepal

a body is warm, blood is red, appearance is the same, but thoughts and attitudes are not same. There is a big and bad practice which has been going on for a long time. Everyone is born as an independent human being in society, but some are treated as a different class of people. Caste is based on origin, heredity and ancestors. It means there are different castes based on where someone is born.

It is said that the caste system was developed according to the occupation that someone had. For example if you work with iron and make tools from iron you are certain caste like Biswakarma. And if you sew clothes you are damai. Likewise every caste was based on a particular occupation, but later on it was changed and practiced in a different way, dividing people into upper or higher caste and lower caste.

Lower caste people have to work for higher caste people as slaves. They were not allowed to touch high caste people. If

it happens that a higher caste person is touched by someone from a lower caste, that person is required to purify himself by water with gold. In Nepali, the term of this water with gold is called Sunpani and chhito. People from the lower caste are not allowed to use public taps, temples or sit together in a festival or a party which is a really inhuman and narrow-minded concept.

Because of such impractical and bad practices Nepal is still behind in its development. Since caste discrimination is a big Nepalese taboo it should be completely eradicated as soon as possible.

I personally have grown up in a family of a so-called high caste, but I have witnessed a lot of discrimination against lower caste people, and because I am blind I had to face discriminatory behaviour from family and society.

I was dreaming of an inclusive society without any sort of discrimination. Luckily I got the opportunity to join the IISE course, which is becoming my doctor indeed. The doctor at hospital could not do anything for my sight, but the IISE course is doing an operation on my dream to make it successful.



Khom Sharma

In the act two of this course, leadership, management, and cultural taboos were the main topics to learn. We had to write a story on a specific taboo which we want

to change in the future.

I wrote a story about caste and blind discrimination in my society. Finally my story was chosen to be turned into a radio play which was great. In the story I am trying to give a clear picture of the caste discrimination and I also wanted to let people visualize the triple discrimination of a Nepali blind woman of a lower caste which is totally unacceptable and full of struggles and challenges. The radio play is called "The Water" and it tells the story of a blind boy from a higher caste who wants to marry a sighted girl from the lowest caste. After the radio play I am really fascinated to have added some more bricks to lay a foundation for this social movement for human equality and dignity.

Act two of the IISE course gave me a strong belief that cultural or social taboos can be broken or changed. It also energized me to stand in front of the society and lead such movements to change people's attitudes about caste discrimination.

I think caste discrimination is condemnable from a humanitarian point of view and should be punishable from a legal point of view.

To develop an inclusive society, thoughts and attitudes should first be inclusive, and if we want to change the world, we should first change ourselves.

Mohamed Salia

(Participant from Sierra Leone)

Female Genital Mutilation: A Harmful Traditional Practice

Female Genital Mutilation (commonly called FGM) is a cultural practice amongst certain tribes across Africa, especially in Sierra Leone, the country where I was born. This is usually referred to as "Bondo Ceremony". During the initiation ceremony, which normally takes

place in the “Bondo Bush”, young girls between the age of 5-15 years are circumcised in order to uphold the tradition and the heritage of the country. By doing so it is believed that women get empowered to becoming good and respectable housewives in future. And also the circumcision acts as a means of reducing sexual pleasure of a woman, thereby reducing her inclination to have extra-marital affairs with other men.

This tradition has caused a lot of harm and not seldom lead to the death of many young girls who had gone through this circumcision process in various communities across the country. Some died bleeding to death during the circumcision process, others got infected with HIV/Aids due to unsterilized instruments used. Those who survived used to tell us that they have problems when urinating and they never have desire for sex as result of the excision of their clitoris.

Even at an early age, I have always felt the harmful nature of this barbaric practice and had wished to put an end to it because it ruined the lives of a large number of young and promising girls. But I decided to wait before I would involve myself. Even if I had gotten the opportunity and strength to fight for the abolition of this practice, I would never have succeeded at such a young age because even relatives of my family and all members of my community were in support of this barbaric practice. And at that time if I had said anything against what the community held so sacred, my family would have been the first to disown me as their son, because no one is allowed to say anything against this 'tradition'. But despite this scared feeling within me for many years as I grew up, I still had the desire to one day advocate for the abolition of this harmful practice not only in my country but in every corner

of the world where it is practiced.

Luckily, my dream now started to become a reality. With a scholarship program, I found myself in the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE), an institute where people wish for the same change I had wished for all my life. They also want to see that harmful traditional practices, be it Female Genital Mutilation, eating disorders, the killing of albinos, or caste discrimination should be stopped and abolished all over the world.

When I think of the way people behave back home against someone who tries to speak against FGM for example, I thought it won't be possible for the IISE to empower us to advocate against these taboos without getting us in trouble.

Interestingly for me, this view of looking at things changed when we started the cultural taboo sessions with Karo, a catalyst from the United States. During the sessions with her, she trained us on various methods used to handle cultural taboos in societies where they exist. During this training, we refined our skills to advocate for the abolition of these harmful traditional practices.



Radio play team “PAST” on stage

As part of the training on how to handle cultural taboos, we wrote short stories about overcoming a cultural taboo that exists in our various communities. The best story was chosen and adapted for a radio play. My team consisted of three

strong and energetic participants, two from Africa and one from Asia, all put a lot of energy in the production of the radio play. It was a positive learning exercise for all of us as we learned a lot from this experience, for example how to direct, mix and edit radio plays of international standard and quality.

Today, all our radio plays are done and ready for broadcast. I wish that our radio play about FGM will be of significance in helping to change this harmful traditional practice not only in my country but maybe in other countries as well.

Cornelia Tenberken (Germany)

A Discussion about Witchcraft

During a visit at the IISE in April, Sabriye had asked me to give a speech to talk about our Workshop for Art and Creativity that my husband, friends and I had established during the late seventies in our rural home area named Morenhoven in Germany. This little village is located close to the city of Bonn (at that time the capital city of Germany). Together with about 15 children and a few grown ups my husband and I created a music-theatre play about witches.

Because of a thousand years anniversary celebration of our village in 1979, we wanted to create a play that had something to do with the history of our region. Up to the seventeenth century, punishment and burning of the so-called witches (women and men) had been an awful part of this history.

As a Workshop for Art and Creativity we were interested in social creativity which meant problem solving within a group and by a group. Thinking about witches, we got the idea of creating a story by improvising situations about becoming or producing an outsider. Through improvisation we wanted the children to become aware of the fear and the sadness of being a scapegoat. We

wanted them to experience, think about the feelings and develop empathy with the drop outs. So the witch story became a perfect metaphor for situations that quite normally take place in children's daily lives.

The plot of the play had to do with a woman who was skilful in healing people and who was beautiful and different in her habits according to other village people. Those people envied her. The lady and her little child were accused of being witches because of some so-called strange occurrences that seemed to have happened since the arrival of this small family.

In our play a group of cleverly researching children found out about the slandering and even lies by the villagers. So the lady and her child were rehabilitated. The end of the plot was the statement: "Witches don't exist, only for stupid people".

Mainly to our participants from African countries this last remark caused lots of interested thoughts which culminated in the following question: Don't white people have witches?

Our answer: Europeans stopped believing in witches and witchcraft about three- to four hundred years ago. For them the power of witchcraft does not exist any more. They think the existence of witches has to do with prejudice.

A lively discussion started. Due to my growing interest and curiosity I decided to invite the participants to my place for an afternoon tea in order to discuss the belief in witchcraft.

Almost all the participants joined the group. They liked to go to a different place in order to keep the witches away from the IISE. They were convinced that witches have the possibility to overcome far distances for they feel attracted when people talk about them. Quite vividly the participants talked about witch stories



Dormitory building at the IISE

they had heard about or they even had experienced either in the neighbourhood or within their own families. For them witches are beings very similar to people. They live with their witch families alongside human beings. Normally human beings do not recognize them as special. Just twins have the gift to reveal their identity. One of our participants, a twin, was convinced that he would be able to unmask a person as a witch. Witches do not have the possibility to develop their personality. Therefore they envy human beings and wickedly try to destroy their lives by casting spells. They might change themselves even into animals and cause harm to people. It was not quite clear whether our participants really believed in witchcraft or not. Since they live in countries, surrounded by people that strongly believe in the existence of witches it seemed to be hard for them to deny witchcraft. Some of the participants felt safe because of being baptised. One participant, a lady with albinism who often was accused of being a witch herself, was strictly against that belief. Others, being blind, were accused to be possessed by demons or witches. Naturally as thinking grown ups they are convinced by the absurdity of such an accusation. Finally all of them agreed that only a profound education and fundamental information will overcome the belief in witchcraft and may destroy that magic

power over people. They agreed that the magic will vanish as soon as the belief in it dies. The students felt and accepted their responsibility to help clarifying and putting light into that dark mystery.



Sahr Yillia, Cornelia Tenberken, Mohamed Salia

One of the participants at the IISE wrote the following article on witchcraft:

Sahr Yillia (Participant from Liberia)

The Dangers of Black Magical Powers

The concept of the African “witch” cannot be talked about without the attempt to let others know what it is all about. According to research and testimonies, “witch” is an internal psychic power that compels a person to consume other people’s lives, but it is not necessarily inherited, and it can be transmitted voluntarily or involuntarily through a type of witchcraft “poisoning.”

Informants have said that something can be secretly slipped into one’s food and the person unconsciously becomes a “witch”. In one case, a friend of mine once told me that a piece of human flesh is put in food, and when eaten, it creates an irrepressible appetite to consume more humans. Although some people believe that witches are cannibals, generally witches are said to convene nocturnal meetings where they collectively feast on

the life of someone, usually a relative offered by one of the group members. Indeed it is said that one needs to only fear witches in one's own family. Consuming a person's life can bring the victim illness, and even death; children are especially vulnerable to attacks. When witches are on the brink of death, they involuntarily confess to the number of people they killed in their lifetime. I once observed a commotion of a dying witch who confessed to the killing of seven people. Witches can transform themselves into animals such as birds, cats, dogs, cows, snakes, and monkeys. They can travel instantly anywhere in the world with different objects like ground nut shells, banana leaves, coconut shells, and so on. These travels are sometimes done at night or at noon; many of us could hardly detect or notice according to captured individuals or groups of this practice. This is why they are feared and frequently blamed for the deaths of loved-ones in Africa. What is still a big surprise to me and many others is that scientists have still not been able to construct the fastest aircraft to be used from one country to another in seconds, but that these "witches" can travel within seconds from one country to another even beyond the African continent.

The second term commonly used is *bõ*, which refers to the use of magical charms and spells that produce a desired effect. These effects are sometimes negative, and the target may be a relative or an unrelated individual. The motivation for *bõ* may arise from intense longing or jealousy. For example, a person may use *bõ* to make someone fall in love or lose his or her money. *Bõ* may be used to bring rain for crops, or to stop the rain during an important ceremony. *Bõ* may cause an enemy to have a fatal accident, or they may be worn like an amulet to protect someone from accidents. Children can be seen wearing *bõ* around

their waists to protect them from illness. Many homes have a collection of charms hanging over the doorway to protect the residents from theft or other dangers. *Bõ* are like occult forces in other societies that could be used for good or bad. But given that they are a specialized knowledge and source of power, they can only be used by trained individuals. They might be translated as "sorcery," especially when used for aggressive purposes.



Lucy Karimi, Sahr Yillia, Jayne Waithera

Furthermore, there is another sector we should never forget: "witch doctors" who are considered professionals. When consulted by their customers, they tell them to bring human body parts in order to prepare very powerful charms for the intended purposes. As a result, they capture and kill human beings to remove their body parts. Mostly they go in search of people with albinism, virgins, young children and so on.

For instance, influential people in African societies today visit "witch doctors" in darkness in consultation for political elections, to gain higher professional positions, to destroy opponents, to gain love, travels or medical treatment etc. I am not a witch, nor do I practice witchcraft, but being an African, I believe witchcraft exists on the African continent. We should not underestimate the witches' capabilities. As several innocent people have been affected seriously by these practices.

As an activist whose dream project is directed towards the development of young people in west Africa, I intend to mount a serious campaign against the above issue after completing my studies at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs. My campaign will raise awareness for the abolition of these brutal, barbaric and inhumane acts. It is against this background that I want to thank the IISE administration for granting me a scholarship to realize my dream as a young social entrepreneur. I am also happy for the opportunity to let others know about this very important issue. I am looking forward to every interested person or group to join me for the sensitisation and awareness raising on this issue. We can no longer continue to watch the so-called "witch doctors" using human body parts, especially people with albinism and other young persons in Africa. Enough is enough.

Work at IISE

Isabel Torres (Lead Catalyst, Spain)

Listen to me!

My good Irish friend Helen was raised by Catholic nuns at a time when ruler ruled education. Back then young minds were not shaped by the smooth, cautious handling of potters, but rather the forceful, iron-willed stubbornness of blacksmiths. Six year old little Helen often came home with tender hands reddened. One after the other, the nuns' notes read the same laconic reports: "Does not pay attention", "Always in that little world of hers", "In the moon", "Doesn't listen", "Hopeless."

It was only after numerous notes and tears that Helen's mum realized the inner problem. The otologist confirmed her suspicion: "Helen is deaf." Her only link

to our noisy world was a weak 20% of auditory capacity on her left ear.

"Sweetheart," screamed mum to the good ear as they stepped out the doctor's consultation, "why did you never tell us you could not hear?"

"But mum, I didn't know..." protested Helen softly, "I thought nobody could hear..."

"Helen, if God gave us two ears, tell me why he would make us hear only from one!"

"But mummy, I thought he gave us two ears so that we could wear glasses!"

The ingenious and irrefutable logic of a six year old first makes me smile, then reflect. Helen's story saddens me. I cannot refrain myself from blaming all those well-wishing educators who in their zeal to correct the child's inattentive behaviour, never took the time to listen and understand the underlying reasons. I wonder whether the deaf girl is the real disabled here.

Throughout my eight years of training experience, I have facilitated many communication workshops. On the opening session, it is always good practice to set up clear expectations. When I ask participants to tell me what motivated them to join a communication seminar, and what it is that they specifically would like to learn, I usually get the same array of requests: "I want to express myself in an effective way", "I want to learn about structure", "I want to be persuasive", "I want to get my point across", "I want people to understand my ideas", "I want to say no", "I want to convince", "I want to tell my boss what I really think and still keep my job!"

So far, neither here in the IISE nor in glamorous corporate classrooms, never

anyone answered to me: “I want to learn how to listen” or “I want to understand others better.” One day this may happen, and I will most likely fall off my chair.

Once participants' expectations are defined, it is my turn to reveal the agenda. And the first point is, I am sure you already guessed it: listening. Yes, we will dedicate two full sessions to listening. Yes, only to listening. A deep silence generally follows such revelation, a sudden sort of energy vacuum. At this moment, I always feel compelled to justify my schedule: “You know, listening is your most powerful tool in communication: you cannot persuade anyone by pushing your ideas to them. The art of negotiation lies in your ability to pull information from others, to understand their ideas. And the first step to understanding is to listen sincerely”. Magically the room lightens with a glow of appreciation, twenty heads nodding in complete unison.



Isabel Torres

We seem to be agreeing, but consensus is evanescent. The power of my magic spell fades rather quickly out of the classroom walls. Out there, in the real wide world, it is a constant battle of words and every one fights for the final say. I hear shouting. I hear clashing. I hear people interrupting each other. More often than not, discussions are disconnected, incongruent, a cacophony of off-tuned brains. Intelligent questions hang in the air and burst like soap

bubbles without provoking a single attempt to correspond with a pondered answer. Hurt egos and heated tempers often turn the best negotiation tables into modern replicas of the Tower of Babel. Let me ask you: when adrenal glands pump in, where are all the nodding heads? All right, we still agree that listening is important, crucial, vital. But it seems to me that its importance often shifts from listening to listening to me!

Listen. We cannot afford not to listen. As long as we enter negotiation with an overpowering purpose of making ourselves understood rather than understanding, healthy communication will not bloom. We learned that there are only three possible outcomes to negotiation: collaboration, compromise and failure. Needless to say that you cannot reach the first two without careful listening.

Listen. We cannot afford failure in communication. We too often suffer from our listening inadequacies. In and beyond the IISE, we all agree that violence, terrorism and war are to be eradicated. These three are the ugliest children of negotiation failure. We cannot reach peace and harmony without genuine listening.

Listen. We cannot afford using our two God-given ears as a mere anatomic support to balance our spectacles and sun glasses. Or as display platforms for precious jewellery and trendy tribal piercing.

Listen. But don't just listen to me. Listen to everyone. Listen especially to those who contradict you, who oppose you, and who sometimes infuriate you. Listen to your boss. Listen to your staff. Listen to those whom you want to benefit. Listen to whom you claim to love. Listen to your mum. Listen to your child.

Listen. Truly, deeply, passionately.

Deepti Daryanani
(Volunteer from India)

Brush with Humanity

Life is a tapestry of events that culminate into an exquisite plan.

I first met Sabriye virtually, through the Oprah Winfrey Show a few years ago. She is one of the women Oprah admires. I distinctly remember when Sabriye walked in like a warrior in a mission. She exuded a fierce presence. On asking about her goal, Sabriye promptly shared her vision of opening an institute in Kerala for the blind. Her voice was powerful, determined and assertive. Mesmerised by this woman I murmured to myself, "Wish I could meet her."

In early April 2009, I was contemplating to putting myself in a totally different circumstance than I have ever been in. I had a strong desire to volunteer, to participate. I was on a roll, searching varied organizations. I knew that this strong pull would take me to some place important.

During this quest, I met up with a few friends of mine in a coffee shop in Los Angeles to share my initial experience with screenwriting. After the read through, my friend promptly responded, "This reminds me of Sabriye, the woman who opened an institute in Kerala for the blind!"

I literally jumped off my chair and with a shrill enthusiastic voice conveyed how I wished to meet her some day!

That was it: I asked Paul and Sabriye to let me volunteer at IISE.

In a world that is conditioned primarily to live in fear and ignorance, to compete with one another and limit ourselves, IISE stands out like the silver full moon. Here you can learn that you don't need to have

vision to be a visionary. That every individual has a potential of endless possibilities and anyone can actualize their dreams provided they work hard.

The prime example of this is Paul and Sabriye who have dedicated their lives to offer opportunities to individuals who have a strong desire to make a difference in the society.

The International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs is situated in the serenity and greenery of Trivandrum, Kerala. The campus so thoughtfully and sensitively built keeping the contemporary ecological conditions in mind.

One lives in total harmony with nature here, where the birds constantly chirp musically in the day and the stars gaze peacefully towards the Vellayani lake at night.

But the true stars are the participants who come from all across the globe. They come from Norway, Japan, several African countries, India, Tibet, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and Nepal.

Each one of them epitomizes one fact that there are 'NO EXCUSES'.

Spending time with each one of them gave me a rare opportunity to taste a slice of their lives. Where they come from, their hardships, their dreams and visions.

Every time they let me in and shared their story, I realized how little I know.

The participants work endlessly and tirelessly to achieve their goals. They work as a healthy team and support one another generously.

What is constant is learning, and IISE symbolizes this.

Having an opportunity to witness Sabriye inspires me deeply. Her charged presence is contagious and driving. She embodies the term "Freedom".

The interactions with the participants

have made me richer and given me deep insights. I can proudly say that I have friends from all over the World.



Deepti Daryanani, Amjad Prawej

All the members of IISE have lived in a common roof, shared the same food, traveled to different places, shared numerous stories with each other and have had millions of moments of laughter.

I am filled with gratitude and the only thing I can offer is endless love and good wishes to all.

Karo Caran

(Visiting Catalyst from Poland)

Breaking Taboos after Daybreak: Formation of the Habit

Taboos, in my opinion, complicate human life. If there were no taboos, that is, if we were brave enough to face different issues, instead of sweeping them off to the shady, hardly acknowledged side of culture, we would be happier. Sweeping the taboos aside does not solve them in any way; it merely prolongs our silent suffering in their oppressive presence. Yet, despite the pain of living alongside taboos, we get used to them, and are hardly ever courageous enough to tackle them. "Ah, the imperfection of human nature!" I thought, as I began preparing for the taboos course at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE).

"How can I shape it in such a way that it will resist the taboos and destroy them, instead of adjusting to them?"

Victor Tsaran, who is my husband and also acted as visiting catalyst at the IISE, and I arrived in Kerala on a sunny afternoon. We unpacked our bags, as we had done with our taboos a while ago, slowly but jointly, making both kinds of unpacking almost seamless. On small wooden shelves, we placed our clothes, books, and cosmetics, neatly, orderly. We went through the same motions that we performed with our taboos. The taboos that lived and grew up with us, and that, I felt, were important to unpack before coming all the way to Kerala and unpacking our bags.

I was happy that we had discussed our childhood and teenage years, our lives filled with experiences of happiness, of accomplishments, sadness, loneliness, death, making friends, being loved or unloved. I'm sure that many of these are quite universal experiences, hard to avoid regardless of class, race, or cultural background. What I cannot be sure of is that all these experiences are so fully discussed and analyzed, ripped apart to search their meaning and put together to make sense of, as we have done. We have done that through words, on long walks, café conversations, unexpected memories that surfaced at dinner. "Through words, transformed into various art forms, be it poems, pictures, or songs," I thought, "we had to let others let go of their taboos."

Each morning, birds, insects, and other animals sang their daily song. After breakfast, when they quieted down, it was our turn, a group of humans sitting around in a circle, to break the silence of the morning hours with discussions, stories, interviews, poems, etc. I do not know whether the non-human song performed

by insects and the like expressed happiness or sorrow, but it was an overture to what was to come during our human interaction. It signified that the quiet night was over, that the morning light has dispelled the grayish dawn, and that now it was our turn to dispel taboos, taboos of all sorts, of wars, of human mutilation, of discrimination.



Victor Tsaran and Karo Caran

Of course, dispelling the dawn is faster than dispelling the stubborn, deeply rooted taboos. It surely did not take a single discussion to uproot them. However, just as the dawn is dispelled every day, so, too, we got into the habit of dispelling taboos. I hope that this habit stays with our class participants forever, that it becomes a ritual for them. I hope they will never forget our magical time together, when we freely discussed all the issues that made their hearts heavy. I saw the magic in their courage and commitment to face taboos. I also saw it in their happy and mostly optimistic attitude towards life, despite all the taboos that they had grown up with.

I hope I will see more magic when they go back to their societies and tackle the taboos there with the same energy and love, not resentment, for humans. Finally, I hope that each time they encounter difficulties, they will think of dawn and how it dispels the night, and how they can dispel taboos and brighten the day.

Art Corner

Amjad Prawej (Catalyst for Voice, Body Language, Stage and Acting from Nepal)

An Actor's Nightmare

"Priya, where are my trousers?"

"What trousers?"

"The ones you used on the stage as a prop just a moment ago?"

"Oh those. I gave them to someone."

"Who?"

"I can't remember."

I am panic stricken. I start sweating despite the air conditioning.

This is the conversation in the backstage with Priya, my co-actor during the performance of one of my plays called 'An Actor's Nightmare' by Christopher Durang. I have just come off stage in my undergarments with less than a minute's time to be back again. I am literally blind and can't tell the difference between a snake and a hose. It's funny how very strong and bright light on stage can blind you off stage. I try to navigate my way in the dark frantically looking for the misplaced trousers. I can't help but think of people who are blind. How do they manage? My attempt turns futile and others come to my rescue. The search begins. I look helplessly towards the stage where I have to be in another 40 seconds from now. Priya is apologizing from the bottom of her heart. "I can't wear your apology to the stage, can I?", I want to scream. But I can't do that. Nope. This auditorium is famed for its brilliant acoustics. You can't possibly snap your finger without the risk of being heard by the audience in the last row. Good acoustics are a privilege for an actor. But in my situation it's anything but privilege. I have to show my anger through whisper. "How the hell can you not remember who took the trousers from you just a moment back?" No answers. I suddenly start

missing 'Projection' and 'Loudness' so much. We know the value of something only when we are restricted to use it.

There is still no trace of my trousers. Malathi, my co-actor for the next scene who is not aware of 'the missing trousers' episode is on the stage. I can see her light a cigarette, in character, and take a deep drag. She is enjoying the background music. She takes another drag expecting my entry any moment. The music starts building up. By this time I should have been standing next to her. But here I am, in the wings, waiting for my trousers to be located. She turns to her right almost ready to take her dialogue when she freezes. I can't tell the exact state of her mind but she is certainly puzzled by my absence. With a slight surprise on her face, glowing with makeup, she looks towards the wings. I know for a fact she can't see me standing there with a stupid expression that I can't put in words for you. The music comes to an end. She is trying her best to stay in character. The music starts playing once more. I am curious what she would do next. Well, like every other 'experienced' actor she chooses to improvise. She lights another cigarette. What an improvisation!! It's really tough to improvise when you are alone on stage I guess. One thing I like about improvisation is the freedom to do whatever you want. There's one golden rule to be followed; don't let the audience know about the goofups. They don't know about the story anyway. Just be confident. Malathi seems to be confident so far. Unfortunately the music comes to an end again and she looks towards the wings with hope. Nothing happens for another 5 seconds. She is a little nervous now. But she decides to stay calm and go for another improvisation. With her trembling hands she lights another cigarette. I determine to go on stage in my underwear before she finishes this

cigarette because I know there aren't any more cigarettes in the packet for her to improvise.

The search is still on. I tell everyone about my decision. As I am preparing to enter the stage, Kishore, another co-actor approaches me. He seems to have a solution. "Here use my spare trousers." My happiness is short-lived.

"Thanks Kishore. But I can't wear these trousers on stage"

"Why not?"

"If you are not aware, my size is 29 and this to me seems to be a size 36!"

"But..."

"I am not so sure if my slim waistline can handle this thing. It might look as if the trousers are wearing me and not the other way round. I would rather go in my underwear."

A sudden realisation hits me during this last conversation. I run to the green room, grab my bag and unzip it. There it is, an extra pair of casual pants smiling at me. They look excited. They are going to be on the stage for the first time since stitched. I grab them and run towards the stage trying to put them on at the same time. Malathi is now sipping wine. Another improvisation! Thank God she realized we needed at least one cigarette after my entry. I rush to the stage. She is so overwhelmed to see me she almost drops her glass. We start exchanging our dialogues. Everything is going well. We now reach a point where she has to light a cigarette. She removes the half-smoked cigarette from the packet and holds it between her lips. "Click." Nothing happens. "Click Click." No, nothing. She shakes the lighter and tries again. "Click Click Click Click." In vain. "Great luck. The lighter has run out of fuel!" I feel bad and wait for her to take her next dialogue. But wait a minute. She doesn't want to give up yet. She is determined to light that damn cigarette. She shakes the lighter

vigorously, blows into it and tries again. Nay. She is now getting angry and frustrated. She bangs it a couple of times to the railing. The bottle of wine resting all this while on top of the railing comes crashing down. Silence!

The audience is having fun. They are enjoying every bit of it. I grab Malathi by her arm and pull her towards the center stage where we have our next scene. She is still clicking the lighter violently. She is sort of hysterical by now. Before taking her next line, she throws the lighter into the wings. 'Bang!' the lighter explodes. The audience is laughing their guts out. Somehow all the goofups are working to our advantage. It is supposed to be a comedy after all. Hold on, here comes the dreaded moment. I start choking. "What happened, Eliot?" I don't know what to say. "Eliot, what's the matter?" I know I have to improvise and say something. But what? I am unable to come up with a suitable answer. "I am choking because of the ash that is NOT coming from your cigarette." This is all that comes out of my mouth. Another great improvisation! The audience can't stop laughing. Well, I choke some more and then I cough three times. She SLAPS me. It feels so real. I am positive to find her fingerprints on my



Stage training with Amjad

cheek later. I feel my cheek. It's hot. We exchange some more dialogues. I am trying my best to be in the scene. But this one thought keeps coming to me again

and again. "How long before SHE coughs three times and then I.....!! " I shall try my best to make it as real as possible.

Four years have passed and I still remember every detail, especially my temporary blindness and frustration. Now, you must be wondering why I chose to share this funny incident. Well, I joined IISE in January 2009 as a catalyst and since then I am involved in the voice, body language and stage training for the participants, mostly blind and visually impaired. And from the day I joined IISE my perception about the above incident changed completely. I got my answer. They manage because they are determined. They not only find their way, they pave their own way. And everyone at IISE is determined. They are busy paving their own way, their way to success. The eyes play the least role when it comes to finding your own way, else the sighted would never stumble and fall. But I do. No, I am not comparing sighted and visually impaired. I am sharing my observation. I saw them swim gracefully when I was scared even to get into the lake, I witnessed their climbing coconut trees and at times I raced with them. When these participants fall, they get up, laugh about it, dust their clothes and move on. They have dreams to fulfill. They have visions to change the world. And no doubt they will. They are leaders in making. They are true Social Entrepreneurs. They see more than me. They see the truth because they don't see merely through their eyes.

Yoshimi Horiuchi
(Participant from Kenya)

A Message from a Bodhi Tree

Dear readers,
In your eyes, ears, and on your skin,
"WHAT IS A LEADER?"
There must be thousands of answers,

as many as the rustling leaves of this deep forest.
Here, I want to share my piece with you.

She is a golden lioness,
loud and proud.
She roars and fights for her pride.
She becomes a wind
when pouncing at the neck of a zebra.
She stands on her hind legs
when a hyena sneaks up to snatch a newborn from her.
She never shows mercy
if an enemy attempts to disturb her pride.
She is a nurturing mother
to a baby whose chance of survival is so slim.

She is always alert,
never loses passion for life.
She takes pride in leading other lionesses,
with ever-lasting charisma.
She has her own way of proceeding.

and is happy to work with those who respect her ideas.
When she roars in protest,
even a mighty lion listens with caution.

I am a bodhi tree,
green and serene.
I listen from dawn to dusk.
A toddler tries to touch my lowest branch
in the earliest sunshine of the day
with utmost seriousness on his face.

A woman with a ragged clothes seeks refuge under my shade in the blazing sun in the middle of the sky,
weeping with an infant in her arms.
A group of passionate youngsters gather around in the beautiful afternoon,
to paint their future with dreams and hopes.
A man falls to the ground under the scarlet clouds,
with wrinkles and fatigue after eighty years of life.

I do not laugh, nor do I cry.
I have never shouted in anger, nor have I clapped in glee.
I listen carefully, through and through,
and guide you through the obstacles.
Any time you want to come, I will be there.
I can give you relief and comfort,
and the inspirations that actually come from yourself.

She and I,
a lioness and a tree.
Completely different, yet similar in every aspect.
We lead and care in our unique styles.
Come under my green roof with your baby.
Let us share what we have and yet to have to become even stronger leaders of the entire forest.



Yoshimi Horiuchi in the IISE sound studio\

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