### Paper on Disability and Arts Festivals in Myanmar

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#### **Introduction**

This paper presents the disability and arts festivals in Myanmar (Burma), particularly why disabled peoples' organizations engaged in art, how the facilitation and preparation made, which the activities implemented and what kind of impact effect to persons with disabilities themselves and society.

#### **Landmark Festival done by Disabled Persons**

The ASEAN Arts Festival of Disabled Artists was hosted in capital city Nay Pyi Taw and commercial city Yangon of Myanmar from December 1st to 7th, 2014. It was the first regional festival where 195 artists with disability from Japan and ASEAN member countries professionally presented their performances together. Amongst them, 118 were from Myanmar and 10 were from Japan. Talented colorful performances of persons with disability and attractive decorations of festival conducted at grand Myanmar International Convention Centre of Nay Pyi Taw completely mesmerized the people and approximately 1,700 spectators including 10 ministers, diplomats and special guests were attended there.

\*\*Myanmar International Convention Centre – MICC is a new and largest building of Myanmar with floor area 312,000 square feet where the government used to hold the official submits and ceremonies.

Then, the festival was continuously conducted at Myoma Parade Ground where is the heart of Yangon and approximately 4,000 spectators including celebrities and civil society leaders were attended.

ASEAN Arts Festival was a parallel activity to coincide the Myanmar year of ASEAN Summit-2014. It was the first for Myanmar to host and organize the regional festival where plenty of professional disabled artists from ASEAN countries performed and maximum government ministries of Myanmar participated together. The festival was unprecedented event and landmark for the country done by persons with disability.

#### Who Organized This

This festival was organized by a local NGO namely "Myanmar Independent Living Initiative-MILI" in close collaboration with peer disability organizations and ministry of social welfare, relief and resettlement of Myanmar.

\*\*Myanmar Independent Living Initiative - MILI is a national level leading self-help organization of disabled persons and has been working for equal rights, full inclusion and independent living of people with different types of disabilities. It is led by disabled youths and has brought a plenty of progresses and successful achievements for disability community within last few years. MILI works for all sectors of health, education, employment, social and political participation of disabled population and engagement in art is important one of these.

### Why MILI Engaged in Arts and How Worked

Previously there existed a lot of talented artists with disabilities in different parts of the country, however they were not known; they never got an opportunity to engage in art activities nor a chance to present their abilities among the public due to lack of an initiative organization who works for disability and arts and lack of supports both from the government and the society. On the other hand, most of people with disability were hidden in their resident homes and institutions and marginalized from mainstream society. Aiming to promote full participation and inclusion of disabled persons and raising public awareness on disability, MILI implemented a three-year project on disability and arts from April 2012 to March 2015 with a full funding support of The Nippon Foundation, which included a series of programs and activities such as providing arts trainings to persons with disabilities for their skill development, arranging the competitions for selection of talented disabled artists, organizing music concerts of artists with disabilities for expanding their art market, broadcasting radio programs on disability and arts for raising public awareness, conducting campaigns and press conferences for promotion of disability inclusive arts, networking with professional artists with disability from ASEAN member countries and Japan and finally organizing and hosting Arts Festivals of Disabled Artists at both national and regional level.

#### **National Arts Festival in 2013**

As part of this in 2013, MILI organized the first National Arts Festival of Disabled Artists in Yangon in collaboration with ministry of social welfare, disabled people's organizations and various arts groups and 263 artists with disability from local and Japan presented their performances. It was an unprecedented event for people of Myanmar and approximately 5,000 spectators including 2 ministers, parliamentarians and diplomats attended there.

Disabled artists themselves said that this is very first time in their life to participate at national level event and show their abilities in front of thousands of spectators in a place. They were so happy and proud of their meaningful participation in the festival. Also it was the first chance for the people of Myanmar to see many of persons with disabilities and their amazing performances vividly in their life.

One of spectators said that she has never found before this to see many of artists with different types of disabilities and their outstanding performances. She felt shame herself for her poor talent in art. Therefore, she decided to support people with disability more from now.

The festival brought lots of positive changes and successes for people with disabilities in Myanmar. Significantly, the ministry of social welfare, relief and resettlement acknowledged the festival and gave the people's popular choice award at national disability ceremony where the State's Vice President, Dr. Sai Mouk Khan and other ministers were also in attendance as the festival was best and most successful event of the year of 2013. Their presence showed that the state recognized the abilities of persons with disabilities and led to their consideration for drafting disability rights law which is enacted by the President U Thein Sein's government two years later after the festival. People's popular choice award is one of very few awards honored by ministry of social welfare, relief and resettlement. The ministry used to select and give the awards every year on international disabled person's day for those individuals or companies who bring the huge achievements for disability community.

#### **Highlights of National Arts Festival**

- Lesettlement, Organizing Committee chaired by Director General of Department of Social Welfare and 9 Sub-committees were formed for festival preparation and working, and 73-representatives from 19- organizations of the government, arts and disability sectors participated voluntarily in the committees and its activities respectively with their self-commitment. \*\*Steering Committee guided the Organizing Committee and gave the necessary support for smooth coordination with other government ministries and departments. Organizing Committee worked for preparation meetings, supervision of Sub-committees, support of implementing activities and evaluation of the festival.
- ♣ 2-celebrity artists of the country voluntarily worked as the Ambassadors of the festival and continuously brought other 25-celebrity artists and thousands of audiences to the festival.
- ♣ 37,000 posters, brochures, stickers and tickets were disseminated to promote the
  festival by the volunteers and network of MILI, and reached out to about 74,000
  people in Yangon and Ayeyarwady Regions. Billboard advertisements were also
  done in 6-public places of Yangon city where 6 million people are living.
- ♣ 2-TV advertisements of the festival were broadcasted 8-times through 3-TV stations and covered about 45-million population of the country (<a href="http://www.yozzo.com/news-and-information/media-broadcasting/digital-tv-transformation-in-myanmar">http://www.yozzo.com/news-and-information/media-broadcasting/digital-tv-transformation-in-myanmar</a>). At the same time, 15-radio advertisements were also done 32-times through 5-radio stations and covered all the population as well.
- ♣ 2-press conferences were organized in Yangon and 126-editors and reporters from 35 media groups attended.
- ♣ 3-music concerts of artists with disabilities which promotes the festival were organized across the country and approximately 1,000 audiences attended.

- ♣ The festival informed artists with disabilities in the country through the newspapers, TV channels, radio programs, journals, brochures, websites, social media pages and civil society organizations which brought in applications from 500-artists with disabilities from all parts of the country to participate in the festival, and finally, 263 of them were selected for the festival through the competitions and Selection Committee participated voluntarily by 51-professional judges from 4-national arts associations.
- ♣ 216-individual artists with disabilities and 11-art groups of persons with disabilities from Myanmar received the art trainings respectively for singing, dancing, performing, playing instruments, Ah Nyeint (Myanmar Traditional Dance & Comedy) and Sine Wine (Myanmar Traditional Orchestra).
- ♣ Approximately 200 youths from Yangon applied to work as volunteers and finally, 125 were selected to help the festival. They mainly worked for logistic arrangements, transportation of artists, distribution of tickets, advertisements, setting up of stage, installation of photo exhibition, and supporting persons with disabilities at the festival.
- ♣ 3-places in the theater were renovated and adapted to make barrier-free for persons with disabilities.

#### Number and Types of Art Categories performed in National Arts Festival

Year	Number of Art Categories	Type of Art Categories	
2013	11-Categories	Singing,	
		• Dancing,	
		Performing,	
		<ul> <li>Playing instruments,</li> </ul>	
		• Painting,	
		<ul> <li>Photos exhibition,</li> </ul>	
		• Literacy,	
		<ul> <li>Documentary show,</li> </ul>	
		<ul> <li>Ah Nyeint (Myanmar Traditional Dance &amp; Comedy),</li> </ul>	
		<ul> <li>Sine Wine (Myanmar Traditional Orchestra),</li> </ul>	
		Japanese traditional music	

### Sponsors and Supporters for National Arts Festival

Sr.	Sponsor's Name	Type of Sponsor	Sponsored Areas
1	The Nippon Foundation	In Cash	161,202 USD
	(Main Sponsor of the Festival)	In Kind	Covered the cost for bringing Koshu
			Roa Taiko (traditional art group from
			Japan)
2	Htoo Foundation	In Kind	500 T-Shirts,
			Refreshment for PWD Audiences of
			Festival

			Renting of Musical Instrument and
			Professional Players
3	Make-Up Khin San Win Group	In Kind	Make-Up Service for all Myanmar
			Artists with Disability in Festival
4	Festival Ambassador, Singer	In Kind	Free rent of Empire Music Band for 3
	Zaw Win Htut		nights
5	Yan Yan Noodle Company	In Kind	Noodles for Artists with Disability and
			Festival Volunteers

#### **ASEAN Arts Festival in 2014**

After the national arts festival was successful held, MILI strengthened the organization and extended the functions and activities to regional level to host the ASEAN Arts Festival of Disabled Artists. Initially from early 2014, MILI contacted and asked APCD Foundation to help for searching and invitation of professional disabled artists from 10 ASEAN member countries in the region. \*\*APCD is Asia-Pacific development Centre on Disability, Bangkok based regional focal foundation working for disability organizations in Asia and Pacific Region. With their assistance, MILI networked and invited lots of disabled artists and their art groups from the region.

### **Highlights of ASEAN Arts Festival**

- → Organizing Committee chaired by Director General of Department of Social Welfare and 13 Sub-committees were formed for festival preparation and working, and 71-representatives from 19-organizations of government, arts and disability sectors participated voluntarily in the committees and its activities respectively with their self-commitment.
- ♣ 2-celebrity artists of the national festival continuously and voluntarily worked as the Ambassadors of the festival and brought other 5-celebrity artists and thousands of audiences to the festival again.
- ♣ 39,000 posters, brochures, stickers and tickets were disseminated to promote the
  festival by the volunteers and network of MILI, and reached out to approximately
  78,000-people in Yangon, Mandalay, Ayeyarwady, Bago Regions and Mon State.
  Billboard advertisements were also done in 5-public places of Yangon city where
  6 million people are living.
- ♣ 2-TV advertisements of festival were broadcasted 10-times through 3-TV stations and covered 45-million population of the country. At the same time, 11-radio advertisements were also done 26-times through 5-radio stations and cover the whole country population as well.
- ♣ 2-press conferences were organized in Yangon and 197-editors and reporters from 38 media groups were attended.
- ♣ 8-music concerts of artists with disabilities which promoted the festival were organized across the country and approximately 2,400 audiences attended.

- ♣ The festival informed artists with disabilities in Myanmar, Japan and other ASEAN member countries through emails, observation visits, regional networks, radio programs, journals and social media pages, and finally, 195 of them were selected for the festival.
- ♣ 10 staff members of MILI made observation visits to 9-ASEAN member countries except Brunei Darussalam to search and select the professional artists with disability for the festival.
- ♣ 118-individual artists with disabilities from Myanmar received the art trainings respectively for singing, dancing, performing, playing instruments, and Sine Wine (Myanmar Traditional Orchestra).
- ♣ A hundred of youths from Yangon applied to support as volunteers and finally, 56 were selected. They mainly worked for logistic arrangements, transportation of artists, distribution of tickets, advertisements of festival, setting up of stage, exhibitions of festival, and supporting persons with disabilities along the festival.
- 4-places in the theater were renovated and adapted to make barrier-free for persons with disabilities.

#### Number and Types of Art Categories performed in ASEAN Arts Festival

Year	Number of Art Categories	Type of Art Categories
2014	9-Categories	<ul> <li>Singing (Modern and Traditional)</li> <li>Dance (Bagan Dance, Tapindine Dance, Wheelchair Dance, Traditional Dance, Street Dance and Break Dance)</li> <li>Myanmar Saing Wine (Myanmar Traditional Orchestra)</li> <li>Koshu Roa Taiko (Japanese Traditional Drums)</li> <li>Musical Performance (Modern and Traditional)</li> <li>Opera</li> <li>Painting</li> <li>Photos exhibition</li> <li>Handicrafts exhibition</li> </ul>

# <u>List of Disabled Artists from Japan & ASEAN Member Countries performed in 2014</u>

Sr.	Country	Sort of Art	Total participants	Contact information
1.	Laos PDR	Art Dance	11	aj axph79@hotmail.com
2.	Vietnam	Musical Performance	4	ngocminh@drdvietnam.com
3.	Cambodia	Khmer Contemporary Wheelchair Dance	5	sathiaalive@gmail.com
4.	Malaysia	Song Singing	6	brianjohnyim@gmail.com
5.	Thailand	Song Singing and Musical Performance	5	ronnajack@hotmail.com
6.	Singapore	Street Dance, Singing(Deaf Version) & Mallet percussion	15	redeafination@gmail.com lily.goh@ehorizons.com
7.	Indonesia	Painting and Traditional Dance	4	ud_al@yahoo.com cacamranggi@gmail.com
8.	Philippines	Wheelchair Dance and Opera	17	mon_apilado_twh@yahoo,com
9.	Myanmar	Wheelchair Dance, Singing, Dancing and Playing Instruments	118	info.myanmarili@gmail.com
10	Japan	Playing Traditional Drum	10	Koshu Roa Taiko Foundation (Japan)

# Sponsors and Supporters ASEAN Arts Festival

Sr.	Sponsor's Name	Type of Sponsor	Sponsored Areas
1	The Nippon Foundation	In Cash	446,405 USD
	(Main Sponsor of the Festival)	In Kind	Covered the cost for bringing Koshu
			Roa Taiko (traditional art group from
			Japan)
2	Make-Up Khin San Win and	In Kind	Make-Up Service for all Myanmar
	Group		Artists with Disability in Festival
3	Myawady Documentary TV	In Kind	Free live broadcasting for Day ONE
	Channel		
4	Galaxy Pro Rent	In Kind	Free rent of Music Band for 3 nights
5	KM Outside Catering Service	In Kind	500 USD
6	Ooredoo Myanmar	In Kind	60 Telephone SIM cards for oversea
			artists with disability

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> National Arts Festival in 2015 with Own Stand on Food

Due to increasement of disability and art movement in the country, persons with disabilities came out more instead of hiding behind of community. Later, they suggested MILI to organize similar event again in 2015. Numerous disable artists who have involved in festivals also asked MILI to create a space for their performances and hold the festival annually. Upon all the demand and request, MILI has decided to continuously lead and conducted the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Arts Festival of Disabled Artists – 2015 in Yangon on 1<sup>st</sup> December in collaboration with ministry of social welfare and disability organizations. 101 disabled artists from local performed in the festival together with 26 artists without disability and approximately 2,200 spectators attended there. Due to impact of former festivals and effort of MILI, local business community getting interested to support the art activities of MILI. Finally, Myanmar Apex Bank, CB Bank, Myanmar Rice Federation and Myanmar Agribusiness Public Corporation who are from business sector have sponsored the festival and The Nippon Foundation, British Council, Htoo Foundation and Tin Moe Lwin Foundation who are non-profit organizations have also supported it respectively.

### <u>Highlights of 2<sup>nd</sup> National Arts Festival – 2015</u>

- ♣ Most of people in Myanmar has been traditionally thinking that it should be cheaper for the handicraft or product produced by persons with disability even the product's quality is good. Many of event organizers and spectators also automatically believe so that it is better to be free show for the concert performed by disabled persons. Under these stereotype thoughts of Myanmar society, it is really hard to sell the tickets for the arts festivals of disabled artists. However, MILI could change it in 2015 and sold 3,000 tickets among the public.
- → Former 2 Celebrity artists continuously and voluntarily stood as the ambassadors of the festival and brought other 9-celebrity artists and hundreds of audiences to the festival.
- Among the different performances in festival, wheelchair dance especially made the celebrity artists and people impressive so much so that they came to realize the potential and performance ability of persons with disability. As one of example, Dr. Chit Thu Wai who is celebrity actress and ambassador of festival appeared to sing together with wheelchair dancers and said to the spectators on the stage that it was the first experience for her. She likes this very much and wants to invite the group to other shows as well. As another example, the official from UNICEF who watched the performances along the night later brought one of Myanmar Business Company and introduced with MILI. The company offered that they want to sponsor for next year festival because now the space is found to participate and support for people with disabilities.

#### Effects and Impacts of Arts Festivals in General

According to 2014 National Census launched by Ministry of Population and Immigration, 2.3 million people (4.6% of total population) are living with disabilities in Myanmar.

However, majority of them have been isolated and marginalized from the society and not having benefits of all the democratic reform and developmental process of the country because of various barriers and lack of supports both from the government and people.

Thanks to arts movement initiated, supported and funded by The Nippon Foundation through MILI working together with disabled artists and their groups through arts festivals, disability issue is getting reached in front line of the public and country. People now start interesting gradually to engage and support in disability works.

On the other hand, persons with disabilities are getting inspired looking at the role models & peer artists and improve their self-confidence.

Ms. Hnin Hnin Theint, who is one of the spectators with physical disability of the festival remarked, "The art has power to make persons with disability stimulated having more hopes and the festivals give us the real happiness to cure our lonely hearts and isolated lives. Arts events create the opportunity to see, meet and communicate between disabled and able bodies who are supporters and spectators, and it promotes the inclusion of the disabled. Also art movement is a good tool to reduce and remove the negative attitude of general public towards disability through "seeing the artistic abilities of persons with disability is believing". Continuously, she said, "The amazing and attractive performances of disabled artists made me inspired so that I have now decided to make my dream come true to improve my painting skill".

Mr. Win Shwe, another spectator with a visual impairment also said, "Of course, I don't have professional talent on arts yet but I admire greatly my other senior peers' ability. Therefore now, I am sharing the message of festivals and opportunities of arts to other persons with disabilities wherever I can reach them".

Along the period of preparation and organizing of arts festivals, 19 disability organizations were involved and worked together in arts activities. It built good relationship and made strong consolidation among disabled leaders to join hands together for their collective voice and common need. Significantly, this movement brought tangible results for whole disability community. As one of example, Myanmar Council of Persons with Disabilities - MCPD, which represents the entire disabled population of the nation, was established at the national level by the collective effort of disability organizations in together with MILI.

#### Effects and Impacts of Arts Festivals on Organizer and People with Disabilities

MILI has been doing a lot of programs and activities for raising disability awareness in the country. However, the people do not interest disability awareness trainings and advocacy talks in general which made them boring. MILI realizes that "art" is a powerful tool to motivate and make the public more interested and participation easily in disability works. Due to the arts festivals, MILI becomes the leading organization in disability and development field of Myanmar. Significantly, the organization was widely recognized by various government ministries, national parliament, union election commission and national human rights commission, and often invited as resource person for their meetings, trainings and activities. And, 13 new non-profit partner organizations approached and proposed to work together with MILI, and 5 of them signed the partnership contracts for disability works. Besides, numerous of persons with disabilities contacted and engaged to MILI so that the membership is now increased into more than 2,200 members.

At the same time, local business community is interesting MILI. 21 business organizations have engaged and participated in the events and conferences of MILI and finally some of them have proposed to work in partnership with MILI for mainstreaming disability. As few examples, Myanmar Blue Ocean Company contracted with MILI and employed 36 persons with disability in their call centre. Myanmar Apex Bank also worked with MILI and employed 9 disabled persons in their offices. Finally, 4 business groups financially sponsored the last festival of MILI. It is the first to see that local business community largely supported in disability works not only of MILI but also of the country.

On the other hand, the first Myanmar Wheelchair Dancer Group and Shae Saung Blind Music Band were appeared and established under the management of MILI through the festivals. As continuous results, those were received wider recognition among public and invited for the performances at the grand ceremonies of Myanmar-Japan Socio-Economic Development Association, ASEAN Disability Forum, International Youth Event, International Women Event and National Human Rights Event where hundreds of people both local and abroad were attended.

#### **Lessons Learned**

- ♣ Farewell and celebration party for the artists, supporters and volunteers who participated in the festival should be organized and honored after the event. It would make a better relationship and built a sustainable network towards future close collaboration among participants for promotion of disability and arts movement in the region.
- ♣ An English language translator should be provided for each overseas artist with disability while they are in the host country. If so, the artists would be able to participate more meaningfully in the festival and could enjoy the social and cultural life of the host country as well.
- ♣ Short narrative introduction about the nature of disability and art-bio of artists with disability should be done before their individual or group performance is appeared on the stage.
- ♣ Collective art movement of persons with disabilities should be facilitated at the regional and international level, and their global network should be established for future sustainable collaboration.

# **Myanmar National Arts Festival of Disabled Artists, 2013**







### Opening Ceremony of the National Arts Festival - 2013



# Entertainments and Performances in the Festival













## Photos Gallery and Painting



Closing Ceremony of National Arts Festival - 2013







## **Goodwill Ambassadors of the Festivals**



Dr. Chit Thu Wai Singer and Actress



Zaw Win Htut Singer







# Organizing Committees' Meetings for Preparation of the Festivals



Music Concerts for Promotion of the Festivals



## ASEAN Arts Festival of Disabled Artists - 2014



## Coordination Meetings with Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement



### Music Concerts for Promotion of the Festival



### Press Conferences of the Festivals





Appreciation Ceremony for Artists and Volunteers



# Visibility Aids and Materials produced for the Festivals



# Media Linkages of Festivals' News

Sr.	Name of Item	Youtube Link
1.	Genius Dancer	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MHllO
		ZZwZI
2.	ASEAN Festival of Disabled	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ARgyn
	Artists Documentary	wViVA
3.	Myanmar Wheelchair	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB4SAe
	Dance of PWDs with Bounce	OEFCq
	Dancer Group	
4.	ASEAN Festival of Disabled	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z62by09
	Artists 2014 Documentary 2	vOng
5.	Philippine Wheelchair	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyEwKl
	Dance from ASEAN Festival	<u>wwhIU</u>
	of Disabled Artists	
6.	Wheelchair Dance of	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94zTtkC
	Physical Impaired Persons	<u>XhUY</u>
	from Myanmar	
7.	Video Clips of ASEAN	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bSgSN
	Festival of Disabled Artists	W6keA
	from Myanmar Celebrity	
8.	News of ASEAN Festival of	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tEP8M
	Disabled Artists 2014 from	<u>Lbtxs</u>
	MRTV 4	
9.	Heart made Artist of	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZYstIG
	Persons with Disability	<u>8XP4</u>
10	Video for ASEAN Festival of	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8W K7
	Disabled Artists 2014	<u>hm57M</u>
11	Immense Spectrum	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66_14U
	Documentary	KWrWs
12	Immense Spectrum 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPeY3IT
	Tarana Maila	yq[Y
13	Japanese Taiko	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wO4KH
1.4	Performance Festival Book for AFDA	CNPAXM
14		http://www.mediafire.com/view/3dy9rglsoylugb2/AFDA 2015 Table Calendar.pdf
	(2014)	https://www.dropbox.com/s/lptadudxwkvrx
		gk/AFDA%202015%20Table%20Calendar.p
		df?dl=0
		<u>ur.ur-u</u>
15	Table calendar for AFDA	http://www.mediafire.com/view/luay6a79z4
	(2014)	shdh9/AFDA Festival Book (2014).pdf
		https://www.dropbox.com/s/mwxsdtuqobg4
		ylr/AFDA%20Festival%20Book%20%28201
		4%29.pdf?dl=0
16	AFDA record video (2014)	http://youtu.be/Kia-jC5AoZ8