

## WOW – Women of the World Kathmandu



**WOMEN** DEVELOPMENT  
**EMPOWERMENT** INCLUSION  
ECONOMIC **SOCIAL** SUPPORT  
**CULTURAL** EQUITY **GENDER**

### 1. CONTEXT

Kathmandu is the capital of Nepal and its largest city, with a population of around 1 million. Kathmandu is, and has historically been, the centre of Nepal's history, art, culture and economy. Although being characterized by a multiethnic population, Nepal remains a secular state. Religious and cultural festivities form a major part of the lives of people residing in Kathmandu.

Nepalese culture remains largely patriarchal. It was ranked at 105 out of 149 countries by the 2018 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.

In 2019, the WOW festival is relocating to Janakpur, an ancient kingdom in southern Nepal, famous as the birthplace of Sita (Ram's wife). WOW will reach less urbanized populations and a province that is marred by gender-related issues, including the highest concentration of child marriage, domestic violence and general poverty. It will take on a grassroots approach, relying on existing cultural infrastructure to create unique conversations on gender equality.

## 2. KATHMANDU AND CULTURE

WOW – Women of the World was launched in 2010 by Jude Kelly (former Artistic Director of Southbank Centre and founder of WOW Foundation) to mark the centenary of International Women's Day. To date, WOW has delivered more than 60 festivals and reached over 2 million people directly in 17 countries on 6 continents.

WOW came to Kathmandu for the first time in 2017. British Council Nepal organized a WOW Thinkin gathering women from different sectors and strands of society to learn and inspire with their stories, and to share ideas and experience. Parallel Thinkins happened around South Asia, contributing to the development of WOW Kathmandu.

WOW came up at a time when female voices have become immensely powerful as a force for positive social change in Kathmandu and across Nepal. It was developed to celebrate women and girls, and to consider the obstacles they face in achieving their potential.

**WOW KATHMANDU PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, PROMOTING THE CREATION OF PLATFORMS TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR RIGHTS.**

## 3. GOALS AND PROJECT

### 1.1. Main aim and specific goals

WOW Kathmandu provides opportunities for women and girls' civic engagement, promoting the creation of platforms to advocate for their rights. WOW aims to challenge attitudes towards gender equality; it listens to women, celebrates their stories and showcases the power of arts and culture in creating dialogue on socially relevant issues.

### 1.2. Development of the project

#### Main actions carried out

The first edition of WOW Kathmandu took place in February 2017, bringing together women from across Nepal and South Asia, offering spaces to share their achievements and look at the challenges they face.

Inspiring women participated in the talks and panels: Negin Khpalwak, the first female conductor from Afghanistan; Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala, the first Sri Lankan to climb Everest; Nidhi Goyal, a gender and disability rights activist from India; Ambassador Nasim Ferdous from Bangladesh, and Jehan Ara, a tech entrepreneur from Pakistan.

In 2018, WOW Kathmandu celebrated the moves forward in gender equality in Kathmandu and across Nepal through debates, workshops, performances, and a vibrant marketplace promoting women owned and led organisations, charities and businesses.

During the 2018 edition, panel discussions focused on including women who have made unconventional choices in their lives. Performances included a writing corner, a photography exhibition, storytelling, a production of the Vagina Monologues, self-defense training and classical dance. Workshop topics ranged from legal rights of women in Pakistan, to online security and solo travel. An



under 10s feminist corner for young people was also organized. Despite being a festival focused on women, it engaged women, men, girls and boys from all strata of society.

In 2019, WOW Janakpur will be more locally focused. It will explore the challenges of Madheshi women, who live across the 800 km stretch of Nepal's southern plains. Considering the geographic and historic links with India and Sri Lanka, WOW will explore cross-border issues and focus on barriers to women's empowerment.

## WOW AIMS TO CHALLENGE ATTITUDES TOWARDS EQUALITY; IT LISTENS TO WOMEN, CELEBRATES THEIR STORIES AND SHOWCASES THE POWER OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN CREATING DIALOGUE ON SOCIALLY RELEVANT ISSUES.

### Main actors

WOW Kathmandu and WOW Janakpur is a partnership between the British Council and the WOW foundation, together with local female curators and partners.

Each year, the festival programme is put together with several local curators: The Institute of Professional Development; Hamro Chahana; Malvika Subba; Eleven11; Fair Trade Group Nepal, and Image Ark. The curators' work includes training the speakers, reaching out to communities, and making the event accessible and inclusive, particularly exploring how women can claim their rights and spaces in a patriarchal society.

The Tribhuvan University's Institute of Engineering was chosen as the venue for WOW 2018. A Venue Prep Project was set up to create a long-term legacy for the partner. Improvements were made through a grant allocation to a local production manager, including the creation of permanent ramps, public lighting and accessible bathrooms. Rohingya refugees were employed to work on the project alongside more than 200 students from the Department of Architecture.

## 4. Evaluation

### Impacts

Each WOW Kathmandu edition had 6000 attendees, including women, men and children of all ages. 53% of them made new, useful connections through WOW activities.

The final evaluation survey found that WOW Kathmandu succeeded in connecting women across the South Asia region. By sharing stories from countries outside Nepal, attendees reported higher awareness of struggles which all women in the region face.

In 2018, 'Bites', short inspiring talks on a variety of issues, were attended by a total of 420 people and the marketplace by more than 3,000 people, sharing services and information from 30 individuals and organisations.

**IN 2018, WOW KATHMANDU CELEBRATED THE MOVES FORWARD IN GENDER EQUALITY IN KATHMANDU AND ACROSS NEPAL THROUGH DEBATES, WORKSHOPS, PERFORMANCES, AND A VIBRANT MARKETPLACE PROMOTING WOMEN OWNED AND LED ORGANISATIONS, CHARITIES AND BUSINESSES.**

### Recommendations

More planning time should be allowed to arrange activities and more consideration to event design should be given in order to build on existing dynamics. Earlier training of volunteers and coordinators, and developing national partnerships with government would lead to smoother delivery and greater sustainability.

Diversity is key in triggering new ideas and solutions; more geographical, societal and gender balance should be fostered, to provide men and women from rural areas with opportunities to participate and voice their opinions. The Festival's legacy content can serve as a platform for continued engagement in gender equality and could lead to wider reach.

## 5. Further information

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