

Thoughts from a Volunteer

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From Ireland in Europe to Nepal in Asia, this journey immediately spells a 'cross cultural' experience.

'Cross cultural communication' or 'intercultural communication' are commonly used phrases. They represent a field of study that looks at how people from different 'cultural' backgrounds endeavor to communicate. The study of this topic was initiated after World War II as global business increased.

Thought to consider these differences in purely communicational terms, and not allowing for the 'color' of different cultures would be an oversight. To not allow for; the vision of two policemen holding hands whilst doing traffic duty in Kathmandu; or the 'better out than in' policy to all secretions allowing for choruses of coughs and wretches, having one side step the result; or simply the differences in dress code, would be to not allow for the differences in other peoples 'norms'.

'Cross cultural communication' studies have been criticized for emphasizing only comparative differences and similarities between cultures, which can say ones understanding, but may not be should aim for. The new phrases are 'cross cultural interdependence'. To understand a different culture to the point of interdependence, certainly sounds like a deeper understanding of another person's 'norms' than just being able to say what is similar between two cultures and what is not.

Though 'cross cultural communication' should not be limited to something experienced only after a flight to another country. 'Cross cultural communication' was one of the elements, one could say, that was lacking at the start of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Two cultures that lived side by side, though understood little of each other. That is an example that is just close to home for me, but it is true for many places where one culture does not understand another. So it is enough to say that what

is 'generally understood' and 'normal life' for one person may not hold true for the other person they are trying to communicate with. Therefore, one must endeavor to understand their neighbor beside them with a view to maybe even learning from them.

It is on this note that I will try to share a little of my personal background. I am from Ireland, which is a small island in North West Europe. It is a country where the highest mountain is not even as high as a Nepali hill, where it rains any day of the year-creating its name 'The Emerald Isle', as the rain brings grass and Ireland has grass as Nepal has paddy fields - and where temperatures range from 4°C to 25°C generally throughout the year. Of Ireland, I am from Dublin, its capital. My interest in being a 'mixed' of 'farm' animal vet brought me through college and to graduation in 2003, out of a class with a slight majority of females. There is a strong majority of females, at present, in the vet college. Life led me to rural Ireland and a peninsula on the North West coast, where I worked in a busy clinical practice. Work included everything from TB testing, to medical cases, to surgical obstetrics, and all in between, within a majority male farming community. Due to some small involvement with VIVA previously, I have presently taken the post of the VIVA volunteer here in AHTCS.

So from a country and landscape that is quite different, from grass lands to paddy fields, and from gentle hills to mountains, one thinks of how one can be of assistance. Though it is in the understanding of these differences, to view the problems arising in Nepali agriculture with fresh eyes, that maybe, one can be of assistance. In the future, I may write of clinical cases or experiences, as anyone requests me to, for now I leave it to pictures to aid the understanding of my journey to Nepal. (Source: Sandesh, AHTCS, February 2008, page-23)