

Man in the middle

After completing his education in the UK, Hikmat Khadka was keen to give something back to his home country of Nepal. His journey has seen him translate for the UN and help under-privileged children

The words we choose are always important, but there are times when those choices become even more vital, as former UN translator and interpreter Hikmat Khadka knows. “It’s an exhausting job,” he says. “It requires a lot of focus and patience, and I constantly feel I have a long way to go.”

Hikmat began working as a translator and interpreter in June 2007, with the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). “I was aware that UNMIN had come to Nepal to support the peace process,” he says. “I was attracted by the opportunity to serve my country, and I had the language skills needed for the job.”

As well as his mother tongue, Nepali, Hikmat speaks fluent English, which was the language of instruction throughout his school years. After studying at Budhanilkantha School in Nepal’s capital, Kathmandu, he travelled to the UK in 1998 to take up a scholarship with the Pestalozzi International Village Trust. Pestalozzi, a UK-based charity that helps young people from developing countries, sponsored him to study the IB Diploma Programme at Hastings College.

Hikmat says he benefited from the comprehensive nature of the IB Diploma Programme, but it’s the CAS component that stands out. “I feel that any human being should be a good combination of creativity, action and service – or head, hands and heart as Pestalozzi puts it – and I think the Diploma Programme has balanced me in those terms.” He fulfilled the ‘service’ element by volunteering at a local primary school for a year, helping children develop reading skills and running workshops to introduce them to Nepalese culture.

But while he enjoyed his time in the UK, Hikmat had no doubts about where he wanted to work.

“I was sponsored by the government of Nepal to study at Budhanilkantha, and I always felt I had to do something for this country. The Diploma Programme taught me the importance of community service, and at



Pestalozzi we often talked about ‘cycles of success’, which complete when receivers of support are empowered to become givers.” The fact that Nepal was going through a period of civil war, during which many were leaving the country, made him even more determined to return.

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Hikmat began ‘giving back’ as a teacher in Kathmandu. In 2002, he became the administrative officer at the city’s Nepal Girls Care Centre, a refuge for orphaned teenage girls, where he remained until the UN opportunity came up. Since 2000, he has also been involved with charity

PAHAD, which supports the education of children from poor backgrounds throughout the country.

Translation has provided even more opportunities to contribute to the future of Nepal. The highlight of

Whether it’s working for the UN (above) or trekking in Nepal’s Rasuwa mountains (below), Hikmat feels at home

Hikmat’s time with UNMIN came in April 2008, when the first Nepalese Constituent Assembly election took place. His role involved interpreting for a group of senior UN officials appointed by the secretary-general: “It was a high-level team, deployed to monitor an historic event. I felt proud to be involved in a such an important mission, and at the same time I gained a deeper understanding of how the electoral system works in Nepal’s context.”

In July 2008, UNMIN downgraded its presence in the country and Hikmat began working as a freelancer: “It involves a lot of brainwork, which is good for my intellectual growth, and I learn a lot from the range of subject matter I cover and the people I meet.”

Projects have included working on booklets about women and children affected by conflict. He also undertakes translation and research work for university students and PhD candidates, which often involves travelling to different regions of the country. Hikmat’s keen to travel internationally too. But no matter where he goes, he is certain about one thing: “Nepal is where my future belongs.”

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