

## Minutes of AHRC Project Meeting of the Project's Steering Committee

22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016

The University of Sussex

Present:

Vinita Damodaran (Sussex),  
Debojyoti Das (SOAS),  
Antonia Moon (BL),  
Chris Mills (Kew),  
Alan Lester (Sussex),  
Paul Basu (SOAS),  
Michael Rayner (Sussex)

After introducing the members of the steering group and outlining their respective roles, Vinita Damodaran gave a brief update on the progress of the project. The exhibitions are set to launch in two weeks, and Vinita stressed the importance of looking forward now to creating a legacy, through the impact of the project.

Vinita Damodaran showed pictures of the exhibition space of the BSI gallery in the Indian Museum, and discussion was made on how to fill the space. The gallery is Victorian and has a long panel running down the middle. Every few metres is a window alcove. The windows have been covered to prevent light damaging the objects. Vinita Damodaran said that the people at the Indian Museum were reluctant to place the Kew's panels on the wall, as they were too heavy and they wanted the freedom to move the panels around. Chris Mills explained that the panels were designed to be lightweight and easy to attach and remove from walls, so this should not be an issue.

Paul Basu said that the juxtaposition of window spaces and panels would not be attractive and suggested covering the window spaces with panels related to the materials of the botanical collections. Hooker was a collector of ethnographic products made from botanical materials, as well as the materials in their natural state. Paul Basu suggested that the panels could each relate to a different material and could be accompanied by artefacts from ethnographic collections.

Debojyoti Das gave an update on the additional materials for the Kew exhibition. In addition to the Joseph Hooker material, exhibitions are being set up on the life of E.K. Janaki Ammal and the medicinal plant collections of the French Institute of Pondicherry, the latter of which comprises eight panels. In addition to this, there will be some displays on Meteorology, featuring the work of Richard Grove and Arun Bandopadhyay, and the BSI's own collections, which are not normally displayed. The Pondicherry panels will also be going to Mysore.

Vinita Damodaran discussed the format of the conferences and said that the Kolkata conference would be inaugurated by the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. Paul Basu suggested recording an interview with the secretary, relating to the exhibition to create additional impact.

Alan Lester suggested the appointment of an Impact Manager, to oversee all of the impact for the project. In addition to measuring the feedback with visitor surveys, this could include creating a project blog, monitoring the press and media coverage, liaising with the children about their experience, liaising with the museums about visitor numbers. He suggested that the institutions collaborating on the project could make statements about how the project has affected them. Schools could do the

same about how they are affected by the exhibitions. Anindita Jhuma was suggested as the Impact Manager.

Paul Basu stressed that the feedback from visitor numbers was limited, as it is quantitative and not qualitative. He suggested that schools would be a very good way of measuring the qualitative impact of the exhibitions. The children can be offered activities which aim to evaluate whether the exhibitions have resulted in them engaging differently with the subjects. Paul Basu gave details of the school study days, which focus on three Bengali middle schools, and aim to take the children to the Museum and the Botanical Gardens, at each of which there will be activities and games, which encourage the children to interact with the exhibitions. Alan Lester suggested communicating with the education authority, and expanding this beyond three schools. The three schools can provide pilot results to encourage the education authority to get involved. Paul further suggested that the exhibitions and activities can be tailored to some degree to fit the curriculum.

Chris Mills gave an update on Laharee Mitra's student placement at the Kew Gardens. She has been working on this exhibition and designing a brochure for the Joseph Hooker exhibition. Alongside she has also been developing ideas to engage visitors, including producing a number of activity cards for children. Anindita Jhuma is due to have a placement at the Kew Gardens in November. Paul Basu suggested that the focus of this placement could be on impact and engagement, as this is the area that she will need to be working in, moving forward. She will also be working heavily with schools and education authorities, so any experience in this area would also be useful. Chris Mills and Antonia Moon both agreed to set up a day working with their respective impact and engagement officers and/or education officers.

Antonia Moon discussed how there was no official brochure for the BL exhibition. She suggested printing the panels in a booklet, and providing that as a brochure. There was a discussion on how to format the translations, and it was decided that the brochures could contain the translated text only, with attractive images on the covers. Antonia Moon also raised the question of how long the BL exhibition would be in the RMNH in Mysore. After Mysore it will be taken around various other RMNHs in the country. Antonia Moon said that there was no reason that it could not be displayed at multiple locations at once, given that the BL aspect of the exhibition was only panels.

Paul Basu said that the reach of the project would be much greater if the exhibitions could be displayed online. It was agreed that both exhibitions should have some degree of online presence, but both Kew and the BL would need to ensure that there were no issues with copywrite. It was also agreed that the entire exhibition should not be available online, as this removes the incentive to visit the museum. Antonia Moon said that there was already a Joseph Hooker website that the BL had developed. This could be linked to the museum (along with other websites connected with the project), both in the brochure under the heading "Find out more" and as a link on the webpage for the project. It was agreed that the central webpage for the project should be hosted by CWEH. Paul Basu suggested that in addition to the activity cards that Laharee Mitra had already produced, some cards could be created that require research on the website. A web trail could be designed, that accompanies the field trips to the Botanical Gardens.

The budget was discussed. Initially the budget had been planned largely for the exhibitions themselves and not for the impact after the exhibitions. The economic consequences of Brexit have also had significant effects on the cost of the project. Vinita Damodaran requested that Kew covered the cost of printing the Joseph Hooker brochures. Chris Mills agreed to this cost.