

ACTIVE CITIZENS

**Globally connected,
locally engaged**

2013–14



Introduction

We have now completed the fifth year of the British Council's Active Citizens programme. It has continued to equip hundreds of thousands of people all over the world with the leadership skills to address some of the big social challenges of the 21st century. Here we share inspirational stories and successes.



Andy meeting the End Impunity NGO in South Sudan

This year, three new countries joined the programme: South Sudan, Uganda and Vietnam. We also started planning the expansion of the programme into the USA and Ukraine. Following a scoping visit to Kyiv, we focused programme design on working with youth in developing behaviour and skills which promote intercultural dialogue and conflict resolution across the whole of Ukraine, and others affected specifically by the conflict in the East of Ukraine. In the newly created state of South Sudan we worked with International Alert and the British Youth Council to deliver a pilot to young people working in civil society. However, the outbreak of war in December 2013 meant that the second phase had to be delivered in neighbouring

Uganda. For Uganda itself, we built on the excellent work done by the EU/British Council/UYONET Ours by Right programme, adding our leadership skills to their existing content on youth rights and empowerment. In Vietnam the programme was piloted with the Communist Youth Union and partnerships are being developed with AIESEC and Live and Learns. For these new programmes the content has had to evolve significantly to remain resonant for these communities with their particular character and context. So this year we developed content for conflict-affected communities and those interested in social enterprise. We remain keen to now develop the programme for women leaders and content promoting gender equity.

We continued our annual International Study Visits between November and February. Over a hundred Active Citizens from 18 countries met in the UK, Sri Lanka, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Burma (Myanmar) to learn from the local contexts, build global connections and lay down foundations for their own social action projects (pages 10–15). In March, the International Partner Networking Event (IPNE) took place in Pakistan giving the 35 delegates an opportunity to share best

practice and new innovations from their own communities. Pakistan is home to ground-breaking work done delivering the programme to lecturers and university students in partnership with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (pages 16–19).

Growing interest in the programme from diverse communities and funders has increased the importance of demonstrating impact. To ensure quality assurance, the Toolkit was developed into a manual for staff, facilitators and partners with guidance notes, learning outcomes, explanation of abstract concepts, case studies, delivery checklists and step-by-step guidance on how to deliver activity. Work is continuing on a digital version which could ultimately be part of a blended learning offer.

We commissioned an external evaluation of the UK programme to better understand the impact of the programme on its UK audience. 100 per cent of partner organisations surveyed agreed that Active Citizens is an effective programme for building intercultural awareness, and an effective learning and development programme. Of the 77 previous participants who responded, 60 per cent thought that Active Citizens had increased their employability, and a third of those who reported a change in employment status said that this could be attributed to Active Citizens. 92 per cent of respondents reported increased social awareness.

Contents

- 02 Introduction
- 04 How Active Citizens works

Programme Highlights

- 06 News in brief
- 10 ISV: what is an ISV?
- 16 Pakistan: university of life
- 20 Syria: a glimmer of hope
- 24 Building bridges
- 28 Inspiring social action

Profiles

- 30 Partner: Development for People and Nature Association (Lebanon)
- 32 Participant: Tahira Zaffar (Taz)
- 34 Facilitator: Ahmed K Menyha
- 36 Active Citizens in numbers

Following recommendations from the evaluation, we have developed a new system to systematically collect impact data and evidence of individual and organisational development (pages 24–27). It is being piloted in the UK and we anticipate rolling this out to other regions from April 2015.

It has been a busy year and I hope this report will demonstrate the positive impact the programme is making as well as our continuing ambition to respond to the needs of our communities.

Andy Hansen, OBE
Head of Society

How Active Citizens works

Active Citizens can be adapted to suit the needs of communities across the world, from South London to South Sudan. Below are the eight stages we follow to ensure the programme keeps its core values but remains relevant, no matter where it is delivered.



National strategy

National priorities are identified and country-specific themes are set, working with government, civil society and third-sector organisations. This includes geographical, target audience and social-development themes.

National call of interest for partners

Local organisations are recruited to deliver the Active Citizens methodology in the communities in which they work.

Partner induction meetings

National or international: partners attend induction workshops to familiarise themselves with the programme content and outcomes, and network with others working in the same field.

Cascade training to community

Facilitators deliver the Active Citizens 'Learning Journey' to participants during a series of face-to-face workshops. At this stage the content is adapted further.

Facilitator training

National or international: staff from local community organisations are trained to deliver Active Citizens' methodology.



Local development of training content

The content for the programme is developed to reflect the themes and priorities identified in the national strategy.

Social action initiatives in community

The Active Citizens use their new skills to develop and run sustainable social action projects that address issues which they have identified in their community.

Connecting communities

International Study Visits, international partner networking, online resources, research, conferences: Active Citizens connect through social media and at international workshops. They share experiences, build skills and generate ideas for social action. Local research and programme data set the agenda for future Active Citizens themes and priorities.



News in brief

Snapshots of this year's work.

Next Generation goes to the ballot box

The first Next Generation report, published in 2009, brought Pakistan's young people to the centre of the debate about its future. It received extensive media coverage, and has since influenced the work of governments, academia and civil society.

In 2013, a series of follow-up reports was published, called Next Generation Voices, which offered new evidence of how young people are shaping Pakistan. This latest series of reports highlighted a range of issues, from attitudes to democracy, conflict and the ageing population. And all off the back of a piece of Active Citizens research to define the national strategy for the country.



Delegates at the IPNE

International Partner Networking Event (IPNE)

In March, an IPNE brought together 35 Active Citizen partners and British Council staff from ten countries for five days of learning and networking.

Held in Pakistan, the event allowed delegates to network and share best practice, innovate and discuss themes and audiences with one another. They heard about the successful Pakistan University Active Citizens Programme which helped them to return to their own country inspired to further expand and implement the programme.

My perspective towards women in Pakistan has taken a complete U-turn. These young women are so confident and motivated. I would like to take this to Sri Lanka to my own University. Thanuja Chandani Sandanayake, Sri Lanka.



Global Conference delegates in Pakistan

Active Citizens revitalises Kraków

2014 saw Active Citizens successfully implemented in Kraków in partnership with Kraków City Council. The project focused on revitalising three districts in the city by bringing about positive change and awakening the potential of local people. Following the success of this, plans are now in place to bring Active Citizens to Wrocław.

A new approach to the project has also been pioneered with the launch of the Active Citizens Academy, a grassroots initiative of Active Citizens alumni in Gdańsk.

The Academy offers two-day workshops every other month to socially engaged citizens. The Academy strives for sustainability and thanks to external funds it has run a Visegrad edition of the Active Citizens programme involving NGO representatives from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and the UK.

See the video here:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN1uOhl-IAI

Inspiring social action project

In Qalqilya two youth groups received Active Citizens training and worked together to develop a plot of land into a garden for elderly people. Their aim – to support an institution that cares for the elderly and has a plot of land, but not a building of their own.

What makes this type of project unique is that elderly people are not usually high on the social action project agenda even though they are an important part of the Palestinian family. This garden will serve the elderly community in the city and as a result, families will be able to visit them, read newspapers to them or take them shopping.

The project has involved lots of different members of society, who are working together to prepare the garden. So far, the plot of land has been bulldozed into shape, internal paths and gates built and trees planted. Two bathrooms have been built and electricity and plumbing installed.



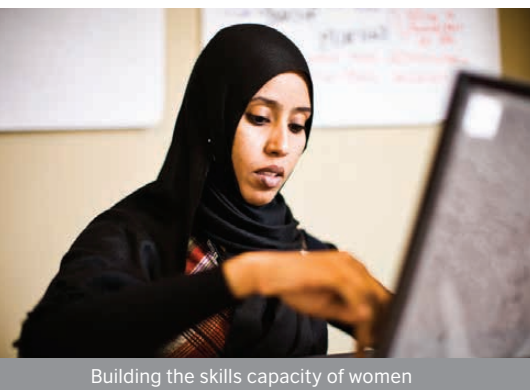
Garden for the elderly in Qalqilya city

Encouraging women to participate in public life (WPIPL)

Women Participating in Public Life (WPIPL) focuses on building the skills capacity of women and women's organisations to support their active involvement in public life.

So far, over 2,000 participants have received face-to-face training through Active Citizens facilitators' developments and cascaded the programme across Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco.

In two years, more than 31 social action projects have been implemented, 54 partner organisations engaged and four core action research teams created. Due to the success of this phase, in 2014 the programme was extended to three new countries, Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, who have now assembled three core research teams and started Active Citizens training in various communities.



Building the skills capacity of women

Leaders of the next generation

UActiv8 aims to create a network of young Palestinian community leaders who will inspire each other to bring positive social change in the separated Palestinian communities of Jordan, West Bank, Gaza, and Palestinians of 1948.

Highlights of 2014 include the implementation of 18 social action projects and the launch of a Facebook page, a virtual Community Exchange Conference to link up 33 young community leaders with facilitators and a London networking event to introduce 20 participants to UK culture and its experience in conflict resolution.

Promoting peace and development in the Horn of Africa

Using the Active Citizens methodology, the British Council in Sudan submitted a proposal for a European Parliament pilot project targeting youth in the Horn of Africa (HoA) which was accepted by the European Union.

Called Horn of Africa Leadership and Learning for Action (HOLLA), the project's overall objective is to contribute to the promotion of peace and development involving youth across Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

The project will aim to build and increase resilience to conflict in these three countries through the capacity building of civil society organisations and the establishment of a youth coalition. It will support young people and communities to better contribute to the region's future.

Active Citizens win awards

Carmarthenshire Active Citizens Group won the Community Development award at the Carmarthenshire Learning Festival's Annual Adult Learner and Tutor Awards 2013.

The award was a result of the Social Action Projects it has undertaken and continued to run since enrolling on the Women Making a Difference Active Citizens course in October 2012. Projects have included negotiations with the National Botanical Garden of Wales to put on training courses in beekeeping.

Amma Mensah, Joel Davis and Luke Rodgers who trained with UnLtd won awards at the LivedIt Awards in May 2014. Read all the results at: <http://living-it.org/lived-it-awards-get-nominating-new>

Active Citizens comes to Vietnam

The Active Citizens programme was piloted in Vietnam with a pioneering partnership with the Communist Youth Union. This new partnership highlights the flexibility of the programme as it was delivered in Vietnamese and condensed to three days. It also demonstrated the ability of Active Citizens to engage in different challenging contexts. In Vietnam the partner is an ideological and political organisation with roots and influence in communities. Active Citizens was able to retain and promote the core values of the programme.

Active Citizens is also building partnerships with AIESEC and Live and Learns and looking for ways to not only run activities with them but also to embed the Active Citizens approach and appropriate content into their own training and operation.



Piloting the programme in Vietnam

What is an ISV?

International Study Visits (ISVs) create a network of Active Citizens who think globally and act locally to make social action happen. But how do they work? Helen Clifton reveals all.

Whether it's Scottish referendum campaigners or Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, grassroots activists are usually at the vanguard of social change – and International Study Visits (ISVs) are where these future leaders get the help they need to realise their vision.

'The first aim of the ISV is to learn from other cultures. And the second is to put people in direct contact with the issues that affect their lives.'

Radha Nair, Active Citizens Director

So far, so simple. But despite its straightforward mission, the week-long ISV course is actually a meticulously planned, intensive schedule of dialogue and networking skills, workshops, community visits and political and civic engagement.

ISVs were first established as a cornerstone of the Active Citizens programme in 2010. More than 100 Active Citizens are selected to participate every year from the 99,000 people worldwide who have completed the programme so far. They share skills, knowledge and experiences from their local communities. For many, travelling to take part in an ISV will be the first time they have left home.

2014 marks the fifth anniversary of the ISV, and demand is growing. Over 2013–14, there were five events in the UK, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka and the Palestinian Territories. This year was also the most diverse yet, with Active Citizens from 18 countries taking part.

Within the Sri Lanka ISV alone, there was over 46 years' experience of running social-action projects among the 30 participants. Participants like Nilusha from Sri Lanka, who works with people with learning disabilities, using theatre to help them overcome prejudices. Tahira, of Manchester, UK, who volunteers to help women deal with mental health and domestic violence issues. And Bojan of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who is determined to help Muslim and Christian youths bridge the sectarian divide.

'These people need to identify their challenges. They often work in very difficult environments, with very low resources and very little support. And as they develop their skills and influence and build relationships, we want to work with them', Radha explains.

The initial stages of the ISV are designed to help the group understand different contexts and cultures. Participants create a fictional global marketplace, where they 'sell' their country to others.

The idea is to challenge preconceptions and start to understand the seemingly disparate links that exist between them.

ISV timeline

2011–12: Kenya, Pakistan, Egypt, UK

2012–13: Bangladesh, Serbia, UK

2013–14: Sri Lanka, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Burma (Myanmar), UK

2014–15: Jordan, Pakistan, Uganda, UK

'We are closely connected in all aspects and walks of life,' explains ISV UK participant Ronald, from Uganda.

One of the key strengths of the ISV is the opportunity to spend time embedded within a community. The visits – facilitated by Active Citizens partners – give participants a powerful opportunity to see first hand how social action can change lives.

'When you expose people to the social issues, you develop their capacity to care'.

Radha Nair, Active Citizens Director

For this year's participants, travelling to places like Bethlehem and Yangon, where the very real impact of conflict is a part of everyday life, evoked some powerful responses.

In Burma (Myanmar), the ISV met conflict resolution group the 88 Generation, who are largely made up of former political prisoners and victims of the 1988 military crackdown.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, civil society is thriving, and projects like the Villagers Association's bid to build a number of 'sun shelters' for schoolchildren are providing hope. This provided inspiration to participants from Sri Lanka.

'I am amazed at what can be done on with so little,' says Bosnian participant Barina. 'I now know that the only real barriers are in our minds.'

This sense of positivity characterised this year's ISVs. Despite witnessing the impact of religious, ethnic and political divisions, participants were moved and motivated by the many projects they witnessed that are successfully working to re-build communities.

The ISV also introduces participants to power structures; what they are, what they do, and how to negotiate with them to achieve change.

Civil society voices like blind Sri Lankan activist Ishan Jalill, whose campaign to force his government to sign up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled Person saw him overcome huge barriers to achieve success, provided a huge inspiration to the Sri Lankan ISV.



Burma (Myanmar) participants preparing their presentations

On a parliamentary visit, ISV UK participants were impressed by the openness and commitment of MP Lisa Nandy.

'Lisa actually goes out to knock on people's doors,' says one participant. 'And she is so young. We have to use this example at home. We, the youth, have to work for change.'

The final stage of an ISV sees participants articulate where, how and when they will put their new skills into action. By projecting two weeks, three months and one year into the future, they create a map for their aspirations.

Powerful bonds formed between the participants often lead to collaborative social-action plans. Participant Kati from Hungary told the UK ISV that she hopes to team up with Haytham from Lebanon to foster greater understanding between the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Northern Irish participants plan to invite their Burmese colleagues to Belfast to learn directly from the peace progress they have made over the past 15 years.

And the powerful use of forum theatre as a participatory tool for change in Sri Lanka inspired many on the ISV to use the process at home.

Over 90 per cent of this year's ISV participants said they have developed skills for dialogue and networking across different cultures, while almost all said they had a better understanding of how local and global issues are connected.

To see the ISV Myanmar in action, go to:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUJzflQvIR0&feature=youtu.be

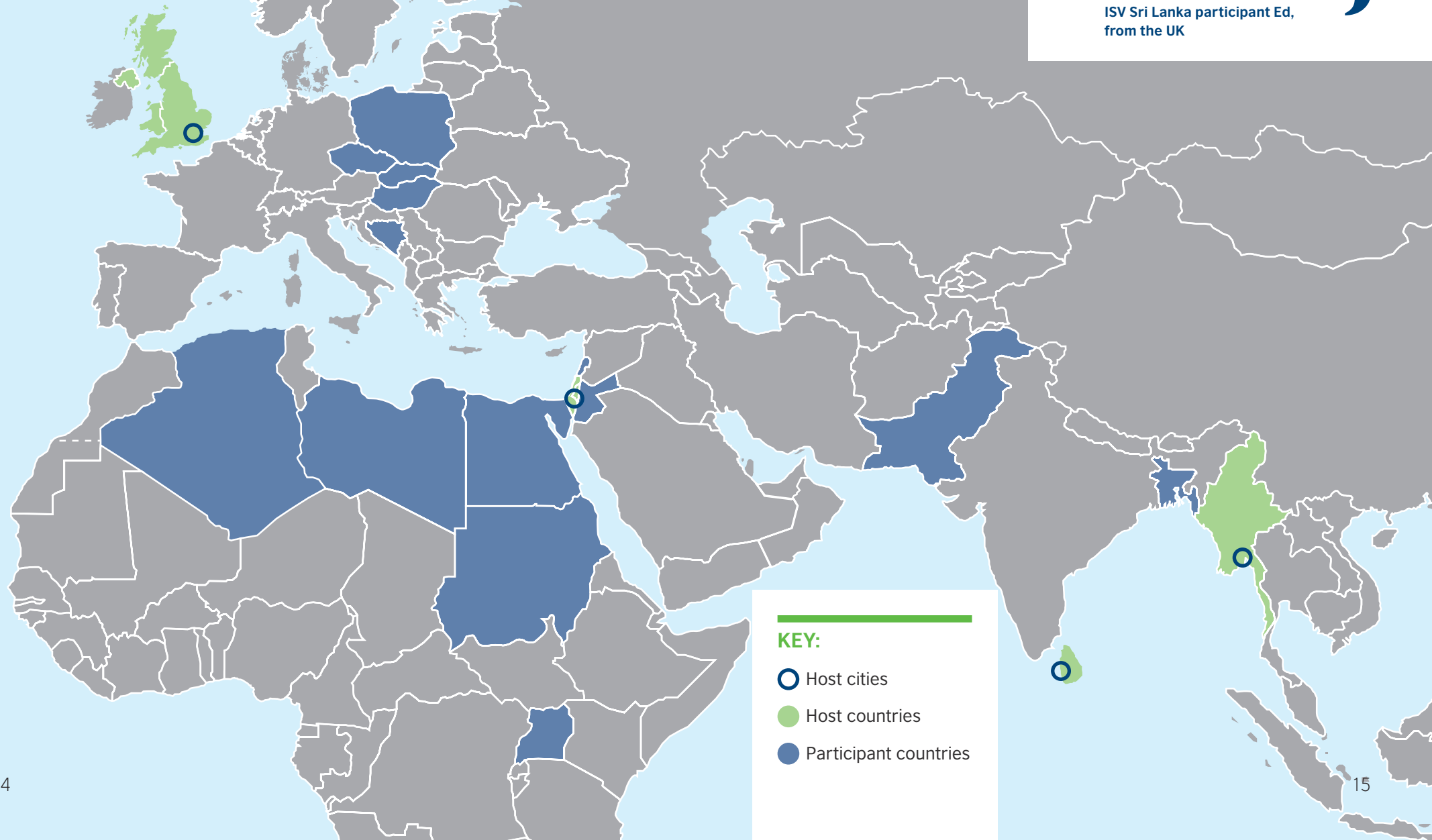


Sri Lanka ISV participants

International Study Visits 2013–14

We all feel a lot more confident and able now. We are more motivated to make it happen, and be the change we want to see in the world.

ISV Sri Lanka participant Ed, from the UK





Active Citizens training is becoming a part of Pakistani university education. Helen Clifton discovered how social action is becoming part of the curriculum.

Pakistan: university of life

With an enormous 40,000 Active Citizens in Pakistan, the appetite for citizenship and social engagement across the country is huge. This figure, however, lies in stark contrast to the huge scale of Pakistan's social problems.

According to the British Council's own research, only one in ten young Pakistanis have confidence in national or local government; less than 40 per cent voted in the last election, while half are not even on the voters' list.

Despite this, young Pakistanis overwhelmingly say they love their country. They are also civic-minded. Nearly half believe education's primary purpose is to learn to be a good citizen or to gain a broad understanding of the world.

British Council discussions with Pakistani universities revealed that these statistics were matched by a keen desire to harness students' commitment to social responsibility. Students themselves were also enthusiastic – the vast majority of Pakistan's Active Citizens attend college or university.

The British Council suggested a solution: run Active Citizens as a mandatory accredited course, to be taken by students alongside their degrees. In 2012, a pilot 'university model' Active Citizens course was designed and taught to 900 students at Lahore College for Women University (LCWU).

LCWU Pharmacy graduate Amna Saeed, 22, was one of the first to try it out. Although initially sceptical, a module on self-identity started to make her think, for the first time, about the concept of citizenship.

'It started to change my thoughts. This was the first time I had thought about myself and my priorities in life. The whole training gave me confidence that I can bring a positive change to my community.'

'It also taught me about the ways to design and start a social-action project. So I looked around and started to analyse – what can I do to make my country better?'

After identifying health and poverty as core issues for local people, Amna joined forces with 18 volunteer students and set up a kitchen gardening project to enable people to grow their own produce.

The project has gone from strength to strength. After recruiting over 1,000 students and community volunteers, they have delivered a series of seminars to other universities – including the Institute of Agricultural Sciences at the University of Punjab – as well as agricultural experts and community organisations.

'In the beginning, I had to go and manage each and every seminar, but now there are a lot of activities successfully happening in my absence as well. I feel like I have sown a seed, and now the plant is growing day by day.'

Amna Saeed

The pilot was successful, and the university model was wholeheartedly embraced. By next year, six universities, in cities including Bahawalpur and Karachi, will have taught the Active Citizens course to over 10,000 students. The programme will soon be launched in 15 colleges across Jammu and Kashmir.

And the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has now agreed to roll out Active Citizens to all public universities by 2017 – embedding Active Citizens across Pakistan's education system, and making social action a fundamental part of every student's life.

For Amna, this is an exciting prospect. She believes Active Citizens training not only encourages citizenship and engagement, but is also invaluable at a professional level.

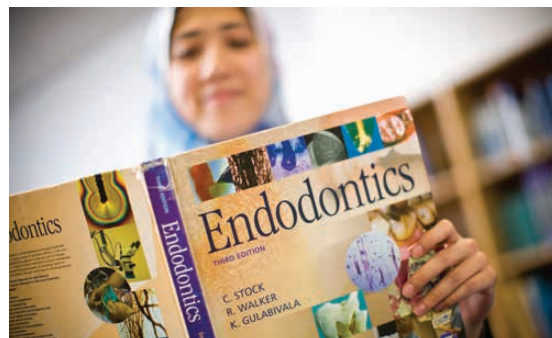
'Skills like planning, management, communication, are missing in the education system. All students should go through Active Citizens to become more confident about whatever they do.'

Amna Saeed

Bahria University Psychology lecturer and Active Citizens facilitator Kiran Ahmad agrees. Although Amna's scepticism was shared by many of his Karachi-based students, they soon recognised that the unique nature of the Active Citizens model actually supports health and social sciences learning.

'Once they got out into the field, they realised that their understanding of psychology helped them in their field experiences, and vice versa. Now I have a large class of excited students who even before starting the course have already mapped out their projects.'

The university model is made up of four eight-hour modules based on the classic Active Citizens themes of identity and culture; debate and dialogue; society and citizenship; and project and business planning.



Student studying

Students then run a social action project in their local communities for six months.

The UK-based Citizenship Foundation adapted Active Citizens for an academic setting, and the model offers citizenship training, opportunities for community engagement, a chance to participate in national and international youth exchanges and policy dialogues – including Active Citizens International Study Visits – and training in participatory methodologies and facilitation.

The course is also designed to be completely flexible and sustainable. After a year's support, the British Council hands over management to the universities.

Like Amna, Kiran says that teaching Active Citizens in universities has also enhanced integration in an increasingly divided Pakistan. Not only has the training encouraged closer relationships between different departments, campuses and institutions, it has also connected many middle class students with their fellow Pakistanis who are forced to live in poverty. In Karachi, a project in which students designed sanitation systems for slums saw them help clean peoples' homes, and gain an intimate understanding of the issues.

'Many students who belong to well-off homes, who have never been out of their comfort zones, have been suddenly exposed to some harsh realities of life,' Kiran explains. 'It has allowed them to empathise more with people from diverse backgrounds.'

The adaptability of the university model means it is now broadening its horizons beyond Pakistan. The UK's Citizenship Foundation is looking at potential Active Citizens links with Brighton University, and there have been talks around establishing a university Active Citizens model in Poland, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Nigeria.

Last year, Active Citizens partners from around the world visited Pakistan to see the impact of the university model for themselves. Participants spoke of how the visit had changed their perception of Pakistan. Many, like Tim Wallace, senior lecturer at the UK's University Campus Oldham, were so impressed they are now in discussions about offering Active Citizens to their own students.

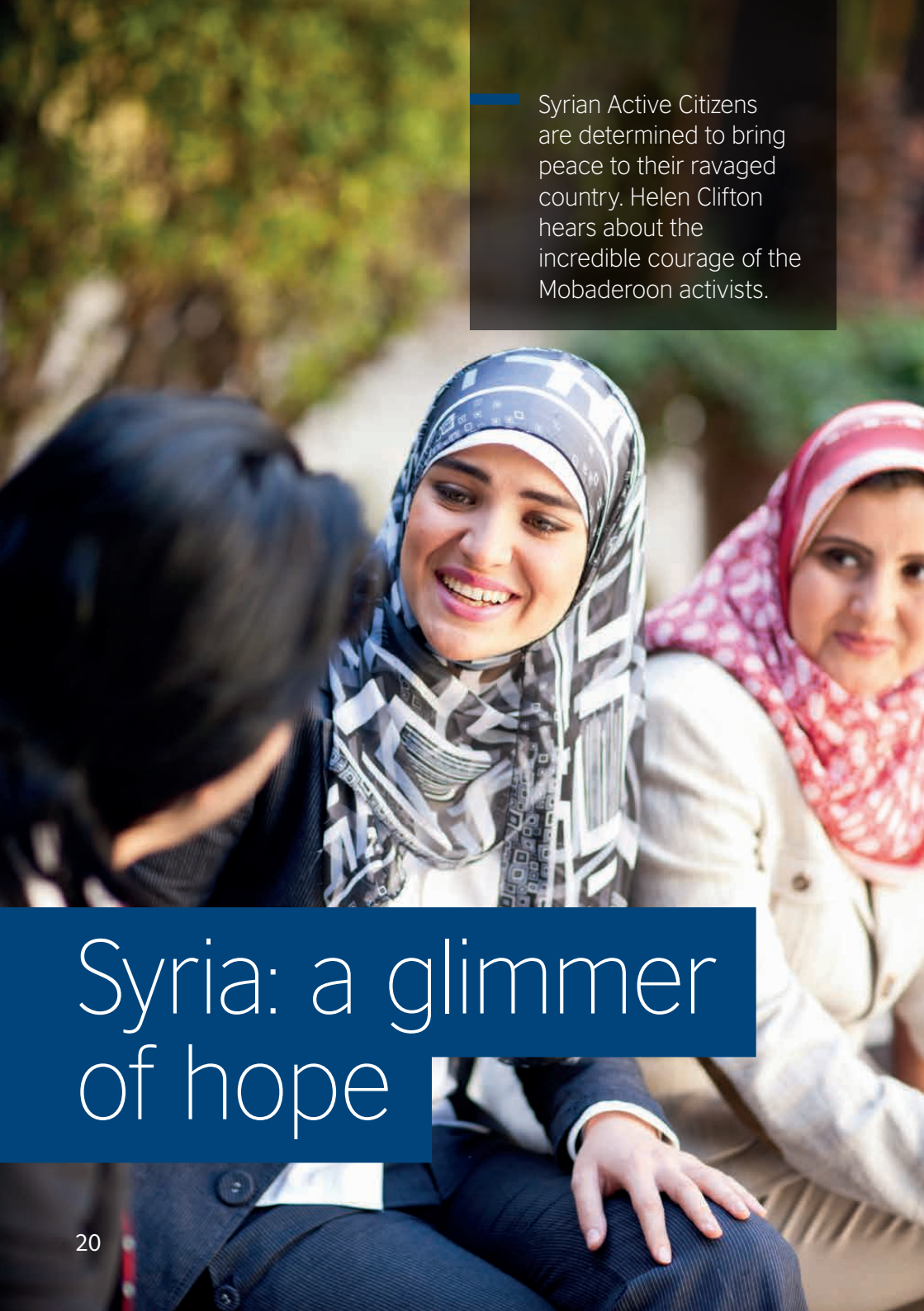
As he explains: 'Active Citizens is embedded into the curriculum not just as another necessary burden of being lectured at and tested – but as a life-changing and enhancing transformative experience.'

Of 200 Pakistani university students who took the Active Citizens course:

- over 130 strongly agreed that they would now be more likely to take action to improve their communities
- over 130 strongly agreed that they had expanded their professional and personal networks
- around 120 strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of social issues within their communities
- around 110 strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of the relationship between global and local issues.

Student social action in Pakistan has been hugely varied, and has so far included:

- an initiative to help people clear rubbish from local slums
- the restoration of inter-faith relations between Muslims and Christians
- computer skills classes for the over-60s
- self-defence lessons for young girls
- Dar ul Amaan (Safe House for Women), a project to teach widows and orphan girls to make handbags and scarfs to generate an income.



Syrian Active Citizens are determined to bring peace to their ravaged country. Helen Clifton hears about the incredible courage of the Mobaderoon activists.

Syria: a glimmer of hope

As the conflict continues, one group of courageous Active Citizens dare to believe that a better future is possible for the Syrian people.

Mobaderoon – ‘the Initiative-Takers’ – are a thriving group of 5,000 local activists and 52 local organisations across Syria who are risking their lives to defy the conflict. Their work is challenging. Planning workshops are held in underground shelters to avoid shelling. Yet these near-impossible circumstances, as Mobaderoon Communications Officer Tayma, 24, explains, have only made them more determined.

‘Syrian youth have always had a sense of frustration that they are incapable of making a change in their communities,’ she explains. ‘Active Citizens restores the power to make a change to the individuals and communities. It’s a fundamental tool to rebuild the Syrian institutions as empowered citizens, with rights and duties.’

Mobaderoon, first established in 2010, was initially concerned with developing project-planning skills. But with the onset of the conflict in 2011, their priority has been to challenge the deep divides that have opened up across the country.

One of their most successful projects has been the ‘We Are Here’ project, in which Syrians are encouraged to wear bracelets designed with messages of peace. One of the Active Citizens behind ‘We Are Here’, 30 year old Rahaf, says the conflict has turned her life ‘completely upside down’.

Forced to leave her job as an English teacher in a Saudi Arabian university, she has been living with her family in Aleppo. The northern city was under siege for almost two years.

‘The strange thing about the Syrian community is that the conflict has shown their best and worst sides at the same time,’ she explains. ‘There have been more crimes – but also more charity.’

She says Mobaderoon and Active Citizens ‘opened her eyes’.

‘I wanted to support the idea of being able to work together for our country, regardless of who we are.’

‘We Are Here’ has had a startling impact, uniting people across the country. People wearing the bracelets have even been saved from persecution after fellow followers recognised the symbol and offered them a safe haven.

‘I wanted to remind people that we are human before religion, race, colour, gender or nationality,’ Rahaf explains. ‘I want Syria to be a better place than it was before the conflict.’

Active Citizens first started in Syria in 2010, when the British Council identified a need to train local leaders. They were funded with £2,500 to cascade their training to others, and the Active Citizens network and Mobaderoon were soon established.

'The Active Citizens programme was the cornerstone of Mobaderoon and is based upon Active Citizens tools and concepts,' explains Tayma. 'Both promote individual contributions to building society, at both national and local level.'

However, the outbreak of war in 2011 resulted in the British Council closing its Damascus offices in 2012. The director and a few senior staff were moved to the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and London, while others were dispersed throughout the Middle East.

Yet despite the fact all programmes inside Syria were suspended, Active Citizens still continued through Mobaderoon's network of facilitators. In order to support their work, Mobaderoon was invited to a 2012 Beirut partner-networking event. Seeing their dedication, the British Council decided to help them out with £20,000 seed funding to continue their work inside Syria's conflict zones.

Beirut-based staff managed the funds on behalf on the group, and over the next two months, Mobaderoon held 15 workshops in areas including Damascus and Aleppo, and over 450 Active Citizens were trained.



Active Citizens in Syria

The programme then linked up with two Syrian NGOs and expanded into two more provinces. The website was launched and they extended even further – to Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, Lattakia, Tartous, Hasaka, Souyada and Homs.

'The Active Citizens are from a mixture of backgrounds and religions. But they have decided to work together,' explains Elie Gemayel, a Beirut-based British Council project worker who has been supporting Mobaderoon.

'The Active Citizens programme has helped broker understanding between the diverse Syrian identities. The training has built an unbreakable trust between participants from different backgrounds who have shared a common space.'

Tayma

These Active Citizens have subsequently cascaded their training, growing the network even further. Mobaderoon has secured funding to continue its work – through the UK's Arab Partnership initiative and the Swedish government, among others – and has now become an official NGO.

Social action projects teach children whose schooling has been disrupted, running crafts and informal artistic sessions. Mobaderoon provides emergency food relief, and has set up traditional storytelling projects to enable people to maintain and celebrate their identity. Psychosocial counselling projects help people deal with the trauma of the conflict.

Its Facebook site has become an effective networking tool for sharing stories with over 10,000 followers.

Just how much dedication has been necessary to maintain the programme? 'There are huge risks,' replies Elie. 'They [the activists] are operating in very challenging circumstances, so some of the workshops have been held in safe spaces in Lebanon.'

'But they believe in the power of Active Citizens. In the midst of the conflict, it has brought people together. It is giving hope for the future of Syria. Mobaderoon is talking a different language.'

Now Mobaderoon has become a national movement, offering workshops on community leadership, psychosocial support, participatory strategic planning and conflict resolution.

Mobaderoon facilitator Rana, 35, shares Rahaf's view that just as the war has divided Syrians, it has also seen many come together.

'Some parts of the community have put their opinions aside and volunteered side by side in humanitarian relief,' she explains.

Rana is determined that her country is not defined by the conflict. She believes Mobaderoon's message of peace is being heard.


'Some of our Active Citizens were involved in violence. But they were actually convinced to let go of their weapons, and go into peace work.'

'And they have now become examples to others.'

www.mobaderoon.org

An estimated nine million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of civil war in March 2011, taking refuge in neighbouring countries or within Syria itself. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over three million have fled to Syria's immediate neighbours Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq; 6.5 million are internally displaced within Syria.

(source: www.syrianrefugees.eu)



Active Citizens partners gain an international perspective and new opportunities. Helen Clifton speaks to partners to find out the benefits.

Building bridges

Following the 2011 UK riots, Jill Mann read various reports that referred to young people having a pervasive sense of hopelessness. She vowed to do something to tackle their alienation.

'I committed myself to bringing hope and skills into the areas where these young people live. And hope and skills are exactly what Active Citizens provides.'

Jill, a project worker with Leeds-based community development non-profit organisation Together for Peace (T4P), has been delivering Active Citizens training in the city since 2010 – and says the programme has given her organisation kudos and connections.

'Active Citizens has allowed us to do some amazing collaborations. Some of our Active Citizens have been through the criminal justice system. I have seen people from all kinds of backgrounds meet up with police to discuss social action projects together.'

In the UK, Active Citizens is delivered through a national network of funded partners like T4P.

By creating partnerships, Active Citizens is building the capacity of these organisations within the huge range of fields they work in – whether it's conflict resolution, community development, or social cohesion.

Active Citizens Director Radha Nair explains that the highly adaptable programme works equally well with individuals, family and organisations.

'Active Citizens has a "systems thinking" approach, which is really just about developing a lens through which we look at society,' she explains. 'And the skills which are developed through that approach are key to personal, community and organisational development. Because they are all linked.'

Dom Weinberg, Policy Manager at the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS), agrees there is something 'unique' about Active Citizens that has benefited all who have participated.

'One of the weekend residentials I delivered as part of our Active Citizen programme was one of the most powerful weekends I have ever experienced – and the same goes for the facilitators as well,' he says. 'We've all just got a huge amount from doing the programme.'

'The appreciative enquiry aspect of the training really stuck with me. Most of us don't really get a chance to reflect on what we do. It's really useful.'

Since being selected by the British Council to deliver Active Citizens in 2012, NCVYS has run three courses for around 90 young people.

Many participants come from existing charities, but some have wanted to set up their own social enterprises. Their input led NCVYS to offer charities created by the under-30s free memberships for a year.

'Non-traditional members have a huge amount of to offer,' Dom explains. 'So this is a way of encouraging them to be involved. It's had a transformative effect on the organisation.'

NCVYS participants have also taken part in International Study Visits, including a visit to Sri Lanka in 2014, whilst representatives of NCVYS have visited Lebanon, Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia as part of networking events designed to build links with international partners.

Dom adds that this international perspective has been incredibly useful.

‘The issues that we are focused on here in the UK are very similar to the issues of rights and identity that are going on elsewhere. By making links with different organisations across the world it changes the narrative around international development. It makes it much more collaborative and equal.’

‘You have to look outside to understand that some of the best examples of best practice are happening internationally.’

Jill agrees. Active Citizens gave T4P participants living in an area affected by many social challenges, and some racial tensions, the chance to visit Corrymeela – a Belfast community known for its peace-building role throughout Northern Ireland’s Troubles.

They met former paramilitaries from both sides of the community who were working together for peace, Jill explains. ‘They were able to see for themselves the similarities between the Belfast communities and the tensions that exist at home. And we were able to share our learning as much as they were learning from us.’

Capacity building has also come through the strong relations built with local authorities. Traditionally, Leeds’ Afro-Caribbean community have been very mistrustful of local police.

But, Jill explains, Active Citizens has opened some doors. ‘We ran an Active Citizens workshop between the police, fire service and the council and a group of local 18–25 year olds. The authorities co-facilitated the workshops, and the idea was for the police to become educators, rather than enforcers.’

One of the participants was so inspired; she applied for a youth and community work degree. Her life experience became relevant in her studies, and she was asked to help train response officers. She is now in the third year of her degree.

‘It’s a significant achievement – and it’s all down to the Active Citizens programme,’

Jill says

By connecting activists and volunteers with those in power, Jill says ‘relational trust’ has been generated with external partners, as well as profile. ISV community visits from international groups have given local Active Citizens a fresh perspective on their home city.



Discussing effective social action plans

‘I chose Active Citizens because I was looking for a way to build relations with other organisations, both in the UK and abroad, that would bring an external dimension to what we do. The ISVs have also given us the chance to “reconnect and rediscover” our own city.’

Jill says the draw for Active Citizens was its flexibility, and the fact the programme could be moulded around different contexts and locations. By developing new ways of thinking, Active Citizens has brought new dimensions to T4P’s work.

‘I was looking for a programme that was ongoing and would bring depth to what we do, rather than just being a one-off activity,’ Jill says. ‘With Active Citizens, we have created our own model.’

Jill has also benefited personally from the heightened profile Active Citizens has provided. She now sits on the panel of a local grant-making body, making decisions about how grassroots social action projects should be funded.

‘It’s been really great to see all these connections that have come out of Active Citizens,’ she adds. ‘People have gone from being unemployed, to being employed. They have gone from having an idea to meeting someone from Kenya on an ISV and being inspired to make it happen.’

‘It’s a ripple effect that leads people to become change agents – and challenge themselves and others to think and behave in a different way.’

Now, thanks to the new system for collecting evidence of organisational development that has been developed for the Active Citizens programme, it is easy to capture these stories of change and identify the journey that an organisation has taken. The system also collects participant information, aggregates and disaggregates data, collects powerful stories from participants and stores reports on community projects. Partners can also use the online monitoring and evaluation system to support their own reporting as well as that of the British Council.

International Relations

In Sudan, a two-year, EU-funded programme teamed up with Khartoum-based Environmentalist Society to train 600 Active Citizens in 20 remote villages across the states of Gedaref and Kassala. ‘Working with the British Council and the EU has increased our effectiveness,’ says co-ordinator Zahir Akasha.

In Poland, Active Citizens has teamed up with the City Culture Institute in Gdańsk, who are hoping to secure funding for the grassroots Active Citizens Academy, as well as the creation of a new Active Citizens movement in Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN1uOhI-IAI

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Eureka organisation in the central town of Žepče has been strengthened in its work building bridges between Muslims and Christians; inspired by the recent Sri Lankan ISV, there are plans to apply for EU funding to launch a joint UK and Bosnian social action project. www.facebook.com/EurekaZepce

Inspiring social action

Giving a voice to Bangladeshi youth

Theme: community mobilisation

City: Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Project duration: eight months

Partner organisation: CCD Bangladesh



Name: Masha Al-Airin Khan

Useful skills gained through Active Citizens programme: public speaking, planning and communication, self-confidence

Proudest moment: 'With every show, we are getting a huge response – that inspires us a lot to get more involved in community development.'

Through partner organisation CCD Bangladesh, Active Citizen Masha Al-Airin Khan started a radio show to give a voice to Bangladeshi youth.

In Bangladesh, a third of the population are under the age of 18. That's over 50 million young people who will shape the Bangladeshi society of tomorrow. A group of young people from Rajshahi felt strongly about starting an initiative in their own community to allow young people's voices to be heard.

Through Active Citizens training, 'we identified malnutrition, dropping out of school, early marriage, eve-teasing [sexual harassment], drug addiction, suicide and the dangers of getting involved in student politics as areas that affect young people in Bangladesh' says Masha. 'It's often the case that these issues aren't discussed enough in the home or in the public sphere.'

They held meetings, discussed different ideas and decided to start a live community radio show where they could raise awareness on social issues affecting young people in the area.

Putting plans in place

With the positive support of the director of CCD Bangladesh and the chief co-ordinator of Radio Padma 99.2 FM, four Active Citizens participated in a weekly show called Youth Voice, broadcast every Friday at 18.00 for one hour, reaching 60–70,000 listeners.

'The first topic was eve-teasing,' says Masha. 'During the show we tried to educate people by explaining the issue of public sexual harassment of girls and women through examples.' The second show covered suicide, where Active Citizen Mahmud spoke passionately about how the community can help vulnerable young people.

Ten radio shows have been broadcast so far and each time more Active Citizens are taking part.

The impact of the show

'We received a number of calls after our first show on eve-teasing and an even bigger response after our second show. People are not only becoming aware of the problems around them but they want to work with us to find solutions,' says Masha.



Going live with the show

'I love the show. The episode about eve-teasing helped my parents to understand that it's not a girl's fault if she is teased. Now my parents support me more than before.'

Nipa, community radio listener

Partner

Profile

Name: Mona Hassouna
Organisation: Development for People and Nature Association (Lebanon)
Role: Programme Manager

What work does your organisation do?

DPNA's mission is to make positive change through interaction and the participation of people at a local and regional level.

What sections of the community does your group engage with?

Our main focus is Lebanese youth, but we also target disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in local communities.

Why did your organisation decide to run the Active Citizens training?

We wanted to have an impact on community stakeholders and arm youth all over Lebanon with the knowledge and skills to promote positive social change.

How has Active Citizens supported the work of your organisation?

It's helped us to achieve our objectives of promoting peace, trust and understanding. It has encouraged youth leadership in the community, created new policies and increased civic education and activism.

What have been the biggest successes since running the Active Citizens training?

Over the past five years we have built a capacity of more than 5,000 people in different regions by providing them with skills in facilitation, communication, negotiation, project management and implementation. We've contributed to the development of more than 40 social action projects, providing participants with mentorship training and connecting them to different stakeholders in their communities to achieve community development and social change. We've also developed a pool of 22 Active Citizens facilitators from 12 different NGOs.



DPNA encourages youth leadership in the community

How has Active Citizens impacted on the work you do?

Through Active Citizens we've been able to expand the programme from one area on a local level to other areas on a national level simply because we were talking about citizenship.

In terms of programming and designing new projects, a lot of our programmes and activities are built on the Active Citizens Learning Journey and the way you develop your target audience.

By Active Citizens International Partners Networking Event (IPNE) and other study visits, we were able to meet different Active Citizen partners from around the world. For example, following the IPNE in Beirut in 2013, we were able to provide skills development to the Ministry of Youth in Libya.

How have your staff found delivering the Active Citizens training?

DPNA team members are passionate about delivering Active Citizens training. As the programme continually progresses, facilitators from DPNA have the chance to participate in its development. The impact of the programme on participants can be measured and assessed throughout the workshops, which then motivates and encourages the facilitators.

The biggest impact we've seen is young people motivated and empowered to make a difference in their community and speaking out about their needs and priorities.

What advice would you give to other partner organisations who are considering running Active Citizens?

It's an opportunity for them to have an impact on their communities and to link up to like-minded partners and activists from around the world. It's an opportunity for CSOs and NGOs to build their organisational capacities as well as empower their approaches towards community development.

What are your plans for the future?

We're planning to start a sustainable training programme so we can provide Active Citizens with training throughout the year.

Also the team of facilitators are working on adapting Active Citizens for refugees in Lebanon as a response to the crisis of the Syrian refugees in the country.

In parallel, and with the support of the British Council, we will try to integrate the Active Citizens programme as a university course in a Lebanese university or a private university.

If you could have one wish relating to civil society, what would it be?

As an activist in Lebanese civil society, my wish is to be able to act collectively with a strategy towards community causes and rights in a timely and effective manner.

Participant

Profile

Name: Tahira Zaffar (Taz)

Age: 24

Location: Bury,
Greater Manchester

Studied: Social Work
BA Hons



What or who inspires you, and why?

My parents inspire me, especially my father, who has always encouraged me to pursue my career and take on challenges in life. I want to make a difference in my community and to provide sustainable support for young people. My career in social work and being part of the Active Citizens programme has allowed me to fulfil this.

How did you hear about Active Citizens?

I saw an advert for participant recruitment at my work place. The programme seemed interesting and I wanted to find out more so I went to the launch day. There I met many other participants, everyone was so enthusiastic and I knew I wanted to join and be part of the journey.

Did you notice a change in yourself as you went through the Learning Journey?

Yes, from the first training session to the social action project to the ISV trip, I learnt a lot about myself. For example, I learnt how to express my own views and expand on my thoughts and ideas for my social action project.

What skills did the training give you?

It's given me communication, project management, organisational, training and volunteering skills. It has also allowed me to make better judgements and decisions. It's strengthened my understanding of valuing the differences and similarities in communities, people and nations.

What have you achieved since going through the training? Any social action projects, or changes in career?

I've drawn up a social action project to empower women who may have been domestically abused or who suffer from mental health problems in order to build their confidence and attain employment support.

Has it changed your relationship with your community?

I now have a far better relationship with my community, as I understand them more and what's best for them. I now play a more active role in the community; attending more social events and important community meetings. I'm more actively involved with the young people in the area and I encourage them to get involved in their community and make a difference.

What would you say to anyone who is thinking about becoming an Active Citizen?

It's an amazing programme that allows you to understand yourself more and gives you the opportunity to be an inspiration to others. You also get to better your local, national and international community and meet other people who are attending study visits.

What are your plans for the future in relation to social action/Active Citizens?

I would love to expand my social action projects and train to become a facilitator. In fact, ADAB has been awarded the next phase of Active Citizens and they've asked me to participate as a co-facilitator so I can learn more on how to facilitate the programme and continue to stay involved. I am extremely excited about this new role, and I feel I am more than able to carry this out, because of all the skills I have gained.

If you could have an unlimited budget for a social action project, what would you do?

I would like to continue the project that we've started around domestic violence and mental health. I would also like to create our own group, get it constituted and work under the umbrella body of ADAB. This will allow us to grow as a group and continue the progress that we are making with our client group.

I believe that if you are passionate to help your community then this is the best programme to get involved in.



Name: Ahmed K Menyha

Age: 29

Role: Facilitator

Location: Kampala, Uganda

Organisation: Integrated Community
Action for Development (ICAD)

Facilitator

Profile

Why did you become an Active Citizens facilitator?

I wanted to improve my communication skills and create more links for my community, organisation and myself.

What did you study at school/university?

I studied primary education, guidance and counselling and then sports science.

What is your day job? How do you earn your money?

I work as a teacher, social worker and football referee. It's from this work that I earn a living to sustain myself and my family. I also earn a living selling art pieces that I make.

What voluntary or civil society work do you do?

Being a counsellor by profession, I offer career guidance, life skills and entrepreneurship training and business clinic services.

What inspires you?

Helping young people to find a solution to their own challenges. Through Active Citizens I have realised that the solution isn't 'out there' but within me and after the workshop I just couldn't wait to start with the little I had.

If you could have an unlimited budget for a social action project, what would you do?

I would make sure that the number of people that benefit from a social action project expands in and outside of my community.

What work does your community organisation do?

We work with youth and provide them with human rights awareness (social, health, cultural and political rights). We advocate for good community governance, good leadership and accountability from the leaders to the people they lead and govern.

How did you hear about Active Citizens?

Through the Uganda Youth Network (UYONET), an organisation that mainly focuses on the development of youth in the different capacities of their lives.

What qualities do you need to be a good facilitator?

- self-confidence and good organisational skills
- assertiveness and creativity
- listening and team work skills
- passionate and practical.

If you could take anyone through the Learning Journey, who would it be?

Young people living in conflict and war zone-prone areas and especially in northern parts of Uganda, such as Apac, Nebbi, Gulu, Arua and other areas around the country, as well as globally and also the vulnerable people in my community.

What change do you see in people as you take them through the Learning Journey?

I see them participating in community challenges, engaged in community leadership and strengthening trust among different members of the community like children, youth and the elderly.

What impact has Active Citizens had on the local community?

It has turned around the mindset of the youth. They no longer ask what community leaders are doing for them but rather they have begun asking the community leaders what they can do for their community.

Describe a social action project that has had a positive effect on the local community?

The Sanitation as a Business (SaaB) project involves picking up garbage and waste paper to improve the sanitation of the community. The materials collected are then used to make products such as beads, books and chalk. It's not only keeping the community clean but some of the art pieces are then sold back into the community.

What advice would you give to anyone who is considering being a facilitator?

I would strongly recommend that every facilitator should focus on translating the river journey into their communities through social action projects. Secondly to read, understand and transform the Learning Journey on their community experience and challenges.

If you could deliver Active Citizens anywhere in the world, where would it be and who would it be to?

Young people living in conflict areas like Gaza, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda.

I am rewarded when I see people putting into practice the knowledge I have given them and seeing their lives changing positively.

Active Citizens in numbers

All statistics relate to the life of the programme to date.

From April 2009 to March 2014



RETURN ON INVESTMENT

£170,000

PER COMMUNITY

BASED ON AVERAGE
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER
HOURS AT

£1.25

PER HOUR

AUDIENCE REACH

510,860

FACE-TO-FACE

3,951,225

DIGITAL

141,346,623

PUBLICATIONS AND BROADCAST MEDIA

151,087,518

TOTAL PROGRAMME REACH

40

COUNTRIES

450

PARTNER
ORGANISATIONS

2,322

FACILITATORS
TRAINED

98,958

ACTIVE CITIZENS
TRAINED

4,353

SOCIAL ACTION
PROJECTS

From April 2013 to March 2014

Impact data for 2013–14

97,211

FACE-TO-FACE

159,652

DIGITAL

673,597

THROUGH CASCADE
TRAINING

205

PARTNER
ORGANISATIONS

508

FACILITATORS
TRAINED

22,997

PARTICIPANTS
TRAINED

The impact of the International Partner Networking Event (IPNE), Pakistan, March 2014.

“The highlight of the visit is to see the scale, engagement and motivation of the university stakeholders regarding Active Citizens.”

“What benefited me was networking with international partners, learning about new ideas of social action and how other countries work on building capacity and mentoring youth through the journey of Active Citizens.”



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Editorial

Editor: Monomita Nag-Chowdhury

Editorial team: Alison Pimblott, Andrea Wilson, Emma Baker, Helen Clifton, Michael Elwin

Programme Director: Radha Nair

Contact: active.citizens@britishcouncil.org

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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office

(FCO) promotes British interests overseas, supporting our citizens and businesses around the globe. The Foreign Office Conflict Pool and the Next Generation Voices on Conflict and Violence both fund the programme.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office



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The European Social Fund (ESF). The is extending employment opportunities and developing a skilled and adaptable workforce. www.dwp.gov.uk/esf



Department
for International
Development

The Department for International Development (DFID), which leads the UK's work to end extreme poverty. www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development

The Arab Partnership is the UK government's strategic response to the Arab Spring. www.gov.uk/arab-partnership-participation-fund



The EU Partnership for Peace supports local and international civil society initiatives that promote peace, tolerance and non-violence in the Middle East. www.enpi-info.eu/library/content/eu-partnership-peace-programme



The Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is responsible for the management of certain parts of the EU's programmes in the fields of education, culture and audio visual http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/index_en.php



The Open Society Foundation helps protect and improve the lives of people in marginalised communities. www.opensocietyfoundations.org



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. www.undp.org/content/undp/en

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www.britishcouncil.org/activecitizens