YOUTH
CHANGES
THE **WORLD**

Records of youth-led sustainable community development initiatives

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Introduction

The world is today aiming to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the time frame of 2015 to 2030. The need to move beyond conventional thinking about "developed" and "developing" countries and for people around the world to walk hand in hand towards the future has been reconfirmed. A 1987 UN report[1] defines "sustainable development" as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". So, what can we do right now to create a sustainable future? In trying to answer this question, it is important to think not only about the distant future of our great planet, but also to deeply explore the immediate issues faced by human communities from the broad perspective of sustainability, in order to find clues to their solution. The driving force behind this effort and the key to its success are the young people of the world - our future leaders who will promote dialogue between different generations. It is from this vision that our Youth-led Sustainable Community Development (hereinafter "Youth Project") initiative began.

This booklet is a record of the activities of some of the young people who have worked together with ACCU to create more sustainable communities in Asian countries, based on a shared vision. As responsible members of their communities, they have confronted local issues, and through an awareness of the inherent risks and threats to sustainability, they have collaborated with fellow young people and a variety of other local stakeholders to take positive action. This is their community-based learning experiences with strong ownership. The cumulative effect of such efforts is transforming individuals and communities towards greater sustainability.

We hope that this booklet inspires everyone engaged in local community development initiatives around the world, and that it also serves as a message of support for all those who are facing diverse challenges and working towards the common goal of a sustainable future.

Last but not least, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the people who have helped us in various ways, from the launch of this project up until today, as well as to all the young people who have driven local initiatives forward and the NGO staff who have supported them.

The Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)

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1   United Nations. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future.*

I.   The Story of Pakistan

In this section, we offer an introduction to a local NGO, Sanjh Preet Organization, which has played a central role in the implementation of our Youth Project in Pakistan, and relate stories of some of the young people and local areas transformed through the encounter with this project.

Youth Project × Sanjh Preet Organization

Pakistan, a youthful   and vibrant country

Pervaiz Akhtar,
Sanjh Preet Organization CEO

In 2014, when ACCU was starting the Youth-led Sustainable Community Development Project, it chose Pakistan as the site for its piloting. Pakistan's history as an independent state is relatively short, dating back only to the independence and partition of British India in 1947. After a number of political changes through the years, the country officially became the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in1973.

Pakistan is young not only as a nation. According to statistics published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 64% of the population is under age 30, and one in four Pakistanis is a member of the "youth generation", aged 15 to 29. The country has more young people today than at any time in its 60-year history. Pakistan's youthfulness presents a huge challenge in terms of development issues like ensuring access to basic education and narrowing the gender gap, but at the same time represents an enormous potential.

ACCU's local partner in the implementation of this project was Sanjh Preet Organization (hereinafter "Sanjh Preet"). Sanjh Preet is an NGO based in Lahore in the province of Punjab in Pakistan. Founded in 1996, the organization aims at promoting social harmony, peace, and social welfare, without getting caught up in politics or religion, mainly focusing on development projects in child protection, WASH (water, sanitation and health), health education and emergency relief.

Below, in the format of an interview with its representative Pervaiz Akhtar, we present the transitions the Youth Project went through since its initiation.

Q A What are the most important goals of Sanjh Preet?

Our philosophy is to help create a society in which people can live a high-quality, independent life, with tolerance and respect for each other, and in which everyone is able to exercise their rights equally. To do this, we are trying to empower localities where government services do not reach and to get local people to engage proactively in the process of development. We are also applying a cross-disciplinary approach to try and effect positive changes in the lives of people facing various social problems. Our approach is based both on international frameworks and national priorities, as well as on local needs, and we focus particularly on children, youth, and women in marginalized communities.

Q A Why do you focus so strongly on young people?

Since it was set up in 1996, Sanjh Preet has carried out projects in many different parts of Pakistan, relating to education, health, and emergency disaster measures. Through this experience, we realized the importance of encouraging young people to participate independently. The younger generations make up more than 60% of Pakistan's total population. As such an important part of society, they need to put their energy and infinite potential to good use and actively engage with their communities for the development of the nation. Similarly, the participation of young people in local development can bring about continual and constructive changes to communities. For all these reasons, we put young people at the heart of nearly all Sanjh Preet projects, in order to obtain results that are locally rooted.

Q A Please tell us how the Youth Project in Pakistan has evolved.

The Youth Project began in 2014 as a pilot programme in two villages in Nankana Sahib District, where we have a regional office. In implementing the project, we saw young people working very actively on various local and constructive activities. For example, youth groups identified village-level problems by themselves, formulated a rural development plan, and then initiated actions to solve those problems using participatory methods. Following the success of the pilot programme, the Youth Project was expanded to a maximum of eight youth groups in four villages, with each village having a male and female group separately.

In the selection of core group members at the stage of launching the groups, we gave importance to certain points. Firstly, they had to have a solid means of livelihood in the local area and agree to work as volunteers. Secondly, they needed to have good communication skills. We also recognized that we needed, as much as possible, to seek participation from different layers of the local society.

Q A What difficulties and challenges did you encounter?

It is always a challenge to get good results with limited financial resources. Still, from our project experience we can conclude that even with minimal financial support, it is possible to achieve good results if appropriate technical support is available. If an organized youth group acts responsibly and with initiatives, it can obtain support from local government officials and prominent members of the local community.

Another challenge was to encourage women to participate in the project in conservative rural areas of Pakistan, and to make global concepts such as education for sustainable development (ESD) and sustainability relevant to local circumstances and conditions.

Q A What changes have you seen in the youth group members and their communities?

All of them became actively involved in the development of their communities. Most notably, while walking around to collect data about the village to get a better understanding of the current situation, they became aware of local problems they had never thought of or noticed. They also learned that they have the power to solve many issues and problems at the local level by themselves, just by initiating action to address the problem. Many of the youth group members have developed greater self-confidence through the project.

The benefits of the Youth Project extended not just to the members who participated directly in the activities but also to their families and local residents. To begin, by showing the data collected by the youth group as evidence highlighting various problems, they were able to make them become aware of the issues facing the community. Just learning that groups like us exist beyond the village was a big turning point. They could begin to look at resources outside the village. The many education-related activities like the school attendance-promotion campaigns and parent meetings organized by the youth group have also made people more interested in educating their children. One of the biggest changes is that people are thinking and reflecting more about the future of the village.
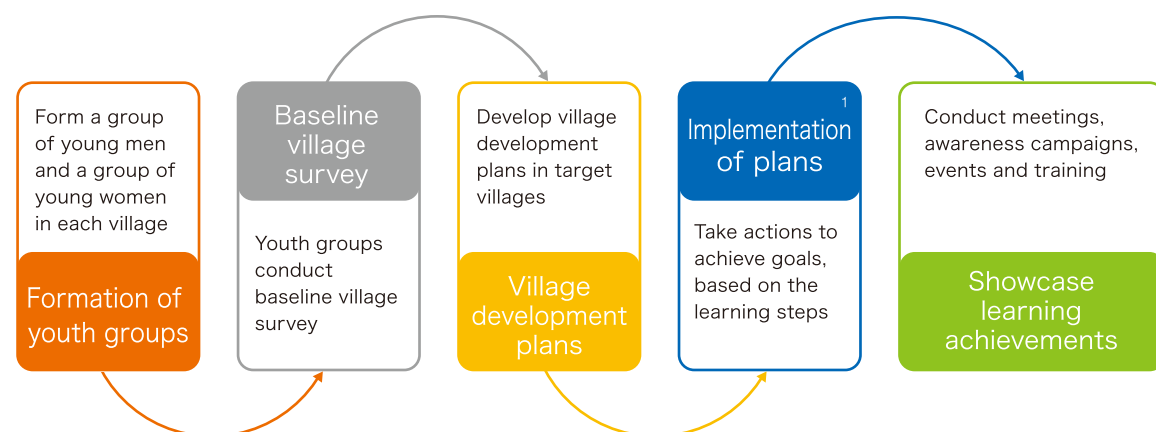
Q A What message would you like to convey to young people?

The society we are aiming at is one in which everyone receives education and has the opportunity for self-realization as a developed and independent individual. If we give young people hope and opportunity, we can surely achieve a society of sustainable development.

The process of implementing activities by youth groups

Form a group of young men and a group of young women in each village

Formation of youth groups

Baseline village survey

Youth groups conduct baseline village survey

Develop village development plans in target villages

Village development plans

Implementation of plans [1]

Take actions to achieve goals, based on the learning steps

Conduct meetings, awareness campaigns, events and training

Showcase learning achievements

1 Learning steps : These are learning steps proposed by the Youth Project for resolving local issues. In the second edition of 2016, incorporating futurology, there are five steps: See, Think & Plan, Act, Evaluate, and Showcase. See p.29 for details.

◀ Campaigning to promote education in the village

▲ Mapping out the future of a sustainable village

PAKISTAN

TURKMENISTAN TAJIKISTAN

CHINA

AFGHANISTAN

Jammu and Kashmir

Aksai Chin

Peshawar

IRAN

Islamabad

Chiniot

Lahore

Quetta

Okara

INDIA

Hyderabad

Karachi

Arabian Sea

Indus

150 km

OCHA

Achievements of the youth group

1 Achieved 100 % enrolment of children in primary schools (between ages 4-9) in the three target villages.

2 Three community-based elementary schools for girls (ages 10-19) were established in the target three villages, and 90 girls completed the programme.

3 One non-formal primary school for girls (ages 4-12)[2] was established and 37 children were enrolled.

4 One community based formal secondary school for boys and girls (ages 14-20)[2] was established in one village with its own resources and 107 children were enrolled.

5 Skills training provided to 40 girls/women.

6 More than 5,000 trees were planted for the safety of the environment.

7 20 potential entrepreneurs were linked up with interest-free loans, and they started small businesses.

8 The youth groups mobilized political representatives at the provincial level and, as a result, a water filtration plant was installed in the target area.

9 The sanitation system and roads of two villages were improved through government schemes.

10 The youth groups worked on advocacy to increase knowledge and awareness on nutrition, maternal and child care, health and sanitation, early marriage, birth registration, etc.

2 Pakistan's public education system consists of primary education (5 years), lower secondary education (3 years), secondary education (2 years), upper secondary education (2 years) and higher education. Although primary to secondary education levels are prescribed as compulsory, the opportunities for girls to advance in their schooling are very limited. The reason behind this lies in the fact that although schooling is segregated by gender, there is a large discrepancy between the number of schools for boys and for girls. Additionally, schools operated by local communities may differ from the public education system in terms of school commencement age and number of years of schooling.

Country profile of Pakistan	
Population (millions)	197.02
Land surface area (sq.km) (thousands)	796.1
Life expectancy at birth (years)	66.6
Expected years of schooling (years)	8.6
Mean years of schooling (years)	5.2
Gross national income(GNI)per capi	5,311

About the organization	
Name	Sanjh Preet Organization
Location	57 J-2 Johan Town Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
Contact	+92 42 35301657 info@sanjhpreet.org
URL	http://www.sanjhpreet.org
Areas of work	Human rights, education, emergency disaster response, youth and citizen participation

Source : World Bank. Country Profile. https://data.worldbank.org/ (Accessed April 2019) / UNDP. (2018). *Human Development Reports 2018.*

Nankana Sahib District

Nankana Sahib District is located 75 km west of Lahore, the capital city of Punjabi Province. Its population is about 1.36 million (250,000 in cities, 1.11 million in rural areas)[3]. Almost 99% of inhabitants speak Urdu and Punjabi. The main industry is agriculture. It is famous worldwide as the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. In rural areas there are few educational or work opportunities, and young people, especially women, tend to be denied participation or ignored in local development and decision-making.

3 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan. Population Census 2017. (Accessed January 2018) http://www.pbscensus.gov.pk/

Women who challenge social norms

Days of educational deprivation

Um-i-Kalsoom lives in the village of Dhoni, roughly 135 km from the provincial capital Lahore. This medium-sized village of 135 households and 850 people subsists mainly by agriculture. Kalsoom's parents worked as peasant farmers. She grew up with three brothers and two sisters. At the age of nine, she was engaged to a man chosen by her parents. This is a case of so-called contract marriage without legal basis. From the time of the engagement until she married her fiancé at the age of 17, Kalsoom lived at home with her parents.

"My chosen partner was unable to read or write. My father was afraid that I might refuse to marry an illiterate person if I went to school and got an education, so I was not allowed to continue school. I was deprived of the opportunity of an education."

Her married life did not last long, however. After just one year or so, she was divorced and she returned to her parents' home. There she attended the community learning centre in town to learn sewing skills, which to this day have provided her with an important means of livelihood.

"My father very much wanted me to be in a position in which I would not have to rely on my brothers and

Kalsoom (31)

sisters after his death. In part because of my previous marriage experience, I also asked my father to let me get married as I thought best next time."

Her father respected Kalsoom's desire and 11 years after returning to her parents, she remarried. She was 28 years old. Her new partner, who has obtained a matriculation certificate (or matric, equivalent to the completion of secondary education), runs a business in Dhoni. As of 2018, she enjoys a peaceful life, feeling blessed to have a daughter and two sons.

Hardship turns to hope

"Saima woke us up from a long sleep."

These are the words of Kalsoom as she recalls how she first met with Saima Zarin of Sanjh Preet. Saima is a female staff member based in Nankana Sahib District. She has been an inspiration for many young people, especially women. For Kalsoom, the encounter with Saima led her to a 180-degree change in her values about life. It was the encouragement of Saima that pushed Kalsoom into participating in the Youth Project.

Thinking about the various problems of the village as a member of the youth group gave Kalsoom the opportunity to see her own life experiences more objectively as difficulties facing society as a whole. To eliminate early marriage and educational deprivation imposed on women, she has been actively working on initiatives, despite occasionally finding it difficult to cope with the lack of understanding surrounding her. At first, her husband was critical, feeling that it was inappropriate for a woman to work so actively outside the home. Apparently, he heard about his wife's activities from the people of the village, and actually opposed her, but Kalsoom's determination only strengthened.

"I explained what we were doing to my husband gently and respectfully. I'm different to how I used to be, because I am not alone now."

Kalsoom has now been working together with 14 other women for four years to try and change the village.

We're not alone

Rehana Maqbool who leads the youth group together with Kalsoom lives in a village nearly 7 km from Dhoni. The youngest of eight sisters, she has earned a master's degree in Urdu and education. Since a year before the Youth Project began in Dhoni, she has been working as a teacher at a non-formal school in the village. Despite her level of social standing and education, it is difficult for her to travel freely between villages, so her father helps her to commute each day. In fact, Rehana's father is a collaborative and reliable presence in her projects. As a former civil servant, the words of her father are said to have a persuasive impact on the locals.

The family situations of the children who attend non-formal schools are complex. Many of the students are from peasant families. Since they need to help their parents during the day, they cannot attend school every day. In light of this, an important key to ensuring that the children have the opportunity to learn is to maintain continual contact and influence on the parents. As it happens, Kalsoom and Rehana first met when Rehana was encouraging Kalsoom to send her daughter to school. To this day, Kalsoom's daughter remains one of Rehana's most valued students.

It was around the same time that the Youth Project came to Dhoni. Since then, the two have built a relationship of trust, both as teacher and parent, and as comrades in the struggle to carve out a better future for the village.

On being asked how they feel about each other, their expressions soften as they reply.

"Kalsoom is always there for me when I need support. Wherever I am, she extends her hand to me. She is a lovely woman."

"Rehana is my daughter's teacher, but at the same time she is like a sister to me. I respect her as a woman and I trust her deeply."

Rehana (24)

Dealing with social norms

In the rural parts of Pakistan, it is definitely not easy for women to gather and work together outside of the home. When the two started the group, they solicited four to five members, mainly people involved in the non-formal school where Rehana taught. Even for this, it took quite a long time to gain the understanding of the people around them. It is not only the husbands, fathers, brothers, and other male relatives that tend to resist the idea of women being active outside the home. In rural Pakistan, the conservative idea that women do not need an education and that they should always stay at home is still deeply rooted. The women of the group faced these social norms with great single-mindedness. They tenaciously explained that their activities were aimed at the development of the whole community, and that participation of the women in the group was in itself a valuable thing. Gradually, they succeeded in obtaining the approval of the people around them. Finally, within the first year, the number of members reached 18, and although several withdrew due to various circumstances, 14 women have continued to participate to this day.

Kalsoom's group has already implemented numerous activities. Its most notable and greatest achievement has been raising the primary school participation rate of the village's girls to 100%, by patiently encouraging families to send their girls to school. For Pakistan as a whole, only 88% of girls attend primary school, and the figure is still lower in more conservative rural areas. In addition, the group adopted microfinance as a means to help women gain more independence. Each member of the group has made use of this system. Kalsoom herself purchased a sewing machine. There is a feeling that the extension of this circle of support beyond the group to other locals and the subsequent empowerment of women is helping to improve the living environment of the whole village.

"The greatest joy I felt was definitely when we succeeded in getting all the village girls to attend primary school. It was also great to be able to reach out to local people in need of help. To begin with, I decided to participate in the group because I felt that the people of Dhoni were not interested enough in their lives. As we continued our activities in the village over the years, other female members gradually became more self-confident and less hesitant about expressing their opinions in public."

Like this, Rehana has also experienced changes in herself through her participation in the project. She seems to have realized directly that learning is much more than the transmission of knowledge; it only becomes meaningful through practice and action.

"When I started to participate in the project, I changed the way I teach. Previously I would conduct one-way lessons from teacher to child using textbooks, but now I also incorporate activities that involve physical movement during the class. Even children who tended to be frequently absent from school are now studying happily."

Pushing open the "heavy door" of the village

The female group of Dhoni village is called the "Arooj

Youth Group". In Pakistan, the word "arooj" means development, pinnacle, or climax. The name was chosen as a message, to the effect that the women of the group wished to work together with the women of the village to strive for greater heights. Sure enough, the journey to date has not always been a smooth one.

For both Kalsoom and Rehana, their most precious experience was their participation in the international symposium organized by ACCU and Sanjh Preet in 2014 in Lahore, the provincial capital. Together with women from other villages, the two had the opportunity to announce the results of their initiatives at the event, which was attended by approximately 100 people,

including news organizations and government officials. This experience gave the women increased confidence, and the Arooj Youth Group became a major force behind the promotion of even more activities in the village.

On the other hand, however, the youth group was looked upon critically by their families and the village as a whole, especially when the women left the village for their visit to the city. Some villagers went as far as to scare the women, suggesting they might be kidnapped in Lahore and never return to the village. Rehana talked about her state of mind at that time.

"We even thought it might be better not going to the symposium, in part because of the envy of other villagers and the backlash from member families. But we realized something. If we gave up on going to the symposium, no one would be able to take advantage of the opportunity. We felt sure that if we took another step forward, other women could follow in our footsteps. We felt that we had to open the door."

After returning home from Lahore, it took half a year for things to calm down, for villagers to stop making disparaging remarks to the women. Rehana sums up her revelation with the following comment she made in a past interview:

"I learned how to make myself happy - that is, by making all the people in the village happy, I become happy. If all the villagers were happy, the village would become rich. What goes around comes around."

The passion the women in the Arooj Youth Group pour into their efforts will surely continue to enrich the village. Despite the antagonism they sometimes face, the women remain hopeful and continue working with conviction. Their courage is helping to create a brighter future for the next generation.

Education shapes the   future of a village

A passion for education, from father to child

Kot Thakray is a relatively large village about 115 km from Lahore. It is home to approximately 3,000 people, living in 430 households. There is no public elementary school, and only one non-formal school. Hamad Liaqat, who leads the village's male youth group, works as a volunteer teacher at the school. With his calm appearance, he is an unlikely looking activist. He strongly believes that improving education can change the future of the village. It is a belief he inherited from his father.

Hamad grew up with two brothers and four sisters in the village of Kot Nehal Singh, in Nankana Sahib: the same district as Kot Thakray. Although his parents were illiterate, they were very attentive to their children's education. When their eldest son, Hamad, reached school age, they donated some of their land to the local government for the establishment of a school. They did the same thing for their eldest daughter. Therefore there are two schools in the village of Kot Nehal Singh today: one for boys and one for girls.

"My father firmly believed in the importance of education, despite the fact that he had never received one himself. He was a very farsighted person. The school strived to create an environment that was as attractive as possible for children, for example by providing lunch each day."

The students' performances at the school established by Hamad's father were so good that the school became famous throughout the district for its excellence. Hamad himself responded positively to his father's wishes and pursued studying. He specialized in physics at a university in Lahore, becoming the first person in the village to earn a

Hamad (33)

Kot Thakray village

bachelor's degree. He then went on to earn master's degrees in science and economics. After graduating, he put his academic qualifications to use, working as a marketing manager in Lahore for several years, until his father fell ill.

"My father wanted me to pursue something related to education someday. As someone who had sufficient land, he probably felt that education was his mission."

After his father passed away in 2011, Hamad went with his family to live in his current village of Kot Thakray, where he began to work at promoting education. While continuing to earn his livelihood from agriculture, he works as a volunteer teacher at the non-formal school established on the land that he donated.

Community development starts with realization

It was in 2014 that the village of Kot Thakray started participating in our project. Hamad, who was already very popular as an educator in the village, supported the objectives of the project and immediately decided to take part.

"At first, I had a lot of trouble gathering members and putting together projects from scratch. Before long, the problems were resolved, however, thanks to the goodwill and trust I inherited from my father and the fact that I myself had built up a relatively strong foundation in the field of education."

In the Youth Project, the young people gather various kinds of information about the local community on their own, so they start their activity by assessing the current state of affairs. The government collects and publishes very little data. In many cases, group members literally go door to door to directly listen to the villagers, so they can gather a substantial amount of information.

"Until we actually started our activities and collected various kinds of data to understand the state of the village, not even us, the group members, could have realized how serious the problems of education and sanitation were in the village. Data collection was a big challenge, but because we did this, the people of the village were willing to listen to our words and we were able to receive support from local people outside the group."

The data collected by the youth groups is very diverse, covering family composition, income, occupation, child labour, health conditions, and access to household water supply. As Hamad said, presenting objective data to people helped them to win local people's understanding and trust and obtain actual financial assistance. When Hamad and his group noticed a very high incidence of hepatitis amongst locals, for example, they requested that the local government investigate further and improve the quality of the village's water sources. As a result of this initiative, a water purification system was installed in the village. This has successfully prevented the spread not just of hepatitis, but also of other infectious diseases such as cholera and typhoid. This is a good example of evidence-based community development.

A bridge connecting the people of a community

The name of the group led by Hamad is Shaheen Youth Group. In the local language, "shaheen" means eagle, which symbolizes the desire to fly high. The word is also often used to refer to young people in Pakistan. The group members come from a variety of family environments, educational backgrounds, and their thinking is also diverse. Yet, few of these young people have left the group, except for those that had to leave the village for employment or other circumstances. Even now, after five years, 90% of the original members of the youth group are still participating in activities.

"We share the same community, the village of Kot Thakray, and we work together to create a brighter future. Each member comes from a completely different background, but working together is not so difficult," says Hamad.

The group's activities are undertaken by the 15 principal members, but 40 other young people collaborate. To facilitate the sharing of information, one person from each street of the village participates as a main member. This provides a mechanism for communicating decisions. Another feature of the group is that they form sub-committees within the group to facilitate deeper discussions on specific problems. Perhaps because this organizational strategy is effective, the existence of the Shaheen Youth Group is beginning to have a positive impact on community connections even beyond the framework of project activities. As an example, when trouble arises between people in the village, the Shaheen group is often asked to intervene as a mediator.

"In the old days, when conflict arose between villagers, people would rush straight to the police station, but now our group is often called in for arbitration. When this happens, we begin by sitting with the parties in dispute and encouraging dialogue. At other times, we might offer to investigate the root of the problem as a third party and propose a solution."

We can see that the youth group is not only resolving specific issues, but is also bringing about changes in the village itself.

Moving ahead with a desire for education

There is also a female group in Kot Thakray village called the Ujala Youth Group. The group is headed by

Hamad's wife, Naseem Liaqat. The two wed in 2006, when Hamad's parents were still in good health. Until the day of their wedding, the two had never once set eyes on each other, yet they shared the same passion for education.

Naseem was the first woman in Kot Thakray to earn a bachelor's degree. Currently she works during the day as a teacher in a non-formal educational facility for girls and after school hours as a volunteer teacher for adult women.

The Ujala group is particularly focused on initiatives connected with women, such as promoting women's education and public health awareness.

"I think that women's education is very important if we want to improve the village. In many cases, however, men do not allow their daughters to go out of the home. So our group makes numerous visits to try and influence them. The key to success is to speak with love and respect. Even people who initially look at us suspiciously gradually come to understand us, as the group gently and repeatedly explains our purpose."

The Ujala Youth Group's persistence has been fruitful, as Kot Thakray achieved a 100% primary school participation rate, including girls. The name "ujala" means light. It was chosen with the wish that the group's activities can serve as a shining light for other women in the village.

Naseem (35)

Creating a better future for the world from Kot Thakray

"I am a very happy person. I am so blessed to have a partner who I can share ideas and passion for education with and work together for the benefit of the village. At home my wife and I often talk about the activities of our youth groups. Sometimes she gives me advice."

The words of Hamad indicate the sense of respect he has for his partner, both as beloved wife and good comrade. Still today, the disparity between men and women casts a long shadow over the whole of Pakistani society, so the example of Hamad and his wife represents a genuine gleam of hope.

The two youth groups led by the husband and wife are already looking ahead to the next step. Their persistent efforts to persuade families proved beneficial, and the goal of 100% participation in primary education for Kot Thakray has already been met. The groups continue to support and encourage families in order to enable children to complete their primary schooling. The next goal is to establish a non-formal educational facility for children between the ages of 10 and 13, so that children who graduate from primary school can go on to further study and respond to their parents' hopes.

"I think the most important thing is awareness. I believe that Pakistan can become the most wonderful country in

the world, if large numbers of people take notice of their personal situation and their family and community circumstances, and if they initiate action to improve all these."

This is a powerful message to us from Hamad.

The joy of learning for all children

Eager to learn

Najma Bibi grew up in Chah Wahab, a village some 140 km from Lahore, with four sisters and two brothers. Her mother is a housewife, her father a driver for a private company. In this small village of just 300 people from 60 households, there is no elementary school, literacy centre, hospital, or other kinds of public facilities. For five years from 2003 to 2007, when another NGO ran a non-formal education support project in Chah Wahab, Najma's father served as an education representative. This initiative enabled Najma, who was just five years old at the time, to receive five years of schooling.

"My educated father was understanding about his daughter going to school. I also had an uncle who was a teacher at the school, so I was quite fortunate. Even so, my father later told me that apart from he and my uncle, other male relatives and neighbours were opposed, so he was painfully aware of how difficult it was for a girl to attend school."

After Najma successfully completed primary education at age 9, she worked at carpet weaving to help with the household finances. However, her passion for learning remained with her. Thus, at age 14, five years after completing primary school, she resumed her studies at a girls' school in a neighbouring village, 1.5 km away; her father respected her daughter's desire to receive an education. Najma then went on to complete her secondary education from the Allama Iqbal Open University, a distance learning university in Pakistan.

Najma (20)

"My dream is to go on to university and continue my studies. Learning is my life."

I want to see all girls receive education

In addition to her own learning, Najma has become passionate about teaching the children of the village to study. However, to secure enough labour for carpet weaving, the village's main industry, girls are often called on to help with the work, and for this reason parents try to prevent them from taking learning opportunities. Saima Zarin of Sanjh Preet, who observed the determined, single-minded attitude of Najma said of her as follows:

"I was inspired by her enthusiasm for education. Since four years before I first met her, Najma has been gathering children from the village to teach them how to study. Seeing that, we decided to set up a non-formal elementary school with the Youth Project and invite her to participate as a teacher."

Now that she was working officially as a school teacher and had Saima's cooperation, it was easier to persuade families and Najma gradually gained the trust of parents, enabling more children to attend school.

Najma is now in the position of leading the youth group of Chah Wahab along with her uncle. Through the Youth Project and her own personal growth, her cherished dream of promoting high-quality education in the village is becoming a reality.

Chah Wahab village

Dhoni village

Utilizing the power of youth for the benefit of the community and its people

Earning trust by implementing activities

Muhammad Azam, leader of the Dhoni Village Tiger Group, runs a tailor shop in the village of Dhoni. When he was six months of age he contracted polio, and for most of his life he has relied on a three-wheeled wheelchair to move around.

"I had a hard time going to school in my wheelchair, travelling 14 km a day back and forth."

Azam encountered the Youth Project in 2014. With faith in the Islamic belief that our actions in this world connect us to our future existence, he always had the ambition to perform charitable social work. So as soon as he learned about the Youth Project, he decided to get involved.

Initially, Azam invited the young people who came to his tailor shop to join in the activities. At first, there wasn't much interest, but as Azam and the group proceeded to collect data and formulate a village development plan, people began to show interest, and slowly the number of members grew.

"For me, the greatest thing we've done so far is getting children who were forced to work at home to attend school, through the youth group's drive to raise awareness. Also, people with more severe disabilities than mine have made use of the microfinance system we offer to start their own businesses. I get a lot of joy knowing that we bring happiness to people through our activities."

What we can do now for the future of the village

The average age of Tiger Group members is lower than that of any other village in the Youth Project. The youngest member is 15 years old. The oldest member is 26-year old Azam, the group leader. Amjad, who is now 18, was only 14 when he started.

"If we young people do not raise our voices, who will do anything for the future of our village?"

Many men in rural Pakistan leave their villages after completing their studies. Amjad felt that as a student, he could devote his youthful energy and time to the benefit of the village. While still a teenager, he has been selected twice as group representative and twice as secretary, and remains actively involved.


Azam (26)   Amjad (18)

Until the youth group was started, most village youths worked with their families in farming and were unaccustomed to spending their spare time on self-development or community activities. The group has planned and implemented various campaigns and events aimed at demonstrating the importance of education and technology. It has also worked on community cleanup drives, and environmental improvement initiatives like tree-planting. These young people have embraced responsibility for local issues and their activities are increasingly oriented to the future of the village.

The Tiger Group now has a meeting place to serve as a base. It was set up in May 2017 from the desire of all members to have a space for planning the future of the village. The funds were donated by Amjad and various others, while other group members collaborated in the renovation. Who knows what kind of sustainable future for Dhoni will be conceived and realized from this base?
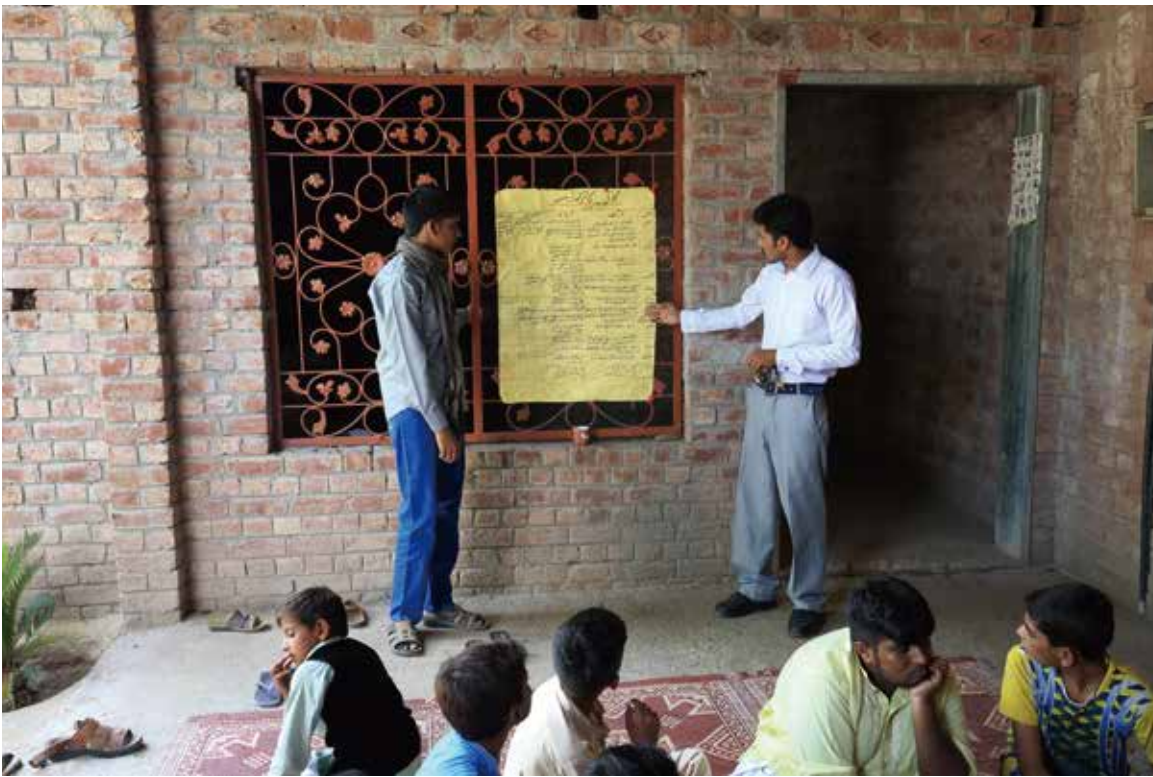
II. Youth in Asia

In this section, we will introduce a few examples of the youth-focused community development initiatives of NGOs in three Asian countries that have partnered with ACCU under the framework of our Youth Project.

1. Case studies from Bangladesh

The circumstances of young people

Bangladesh is a nation located to the east of India, with a total population of about 166.4 million as of 2018. It is the eighth most populous country in the world, and 30% of its people are aged 10 to 24.[1] Unemployment has become a major social problem for the young generation, and so the national government has poured a lot of effort into job creation. The unemployment rate in recent years has been around 4% and above, and almost 30% of the young population remains "NEETs" (not in employment, education or training).[2] There is also a striking disparity between urban and rural areas. Thus, delivering education and training opportunities for the young generation to help them address the needs of society could be a fruitful investment towards the development and sustainable future of the country.

Project target area

The Youth Project has been carried out mainly in the Chandpur and Brahmanbaria districts of Chittagong Division in southeastern Bangladesh. Literacy and sanitation are major local issues in both districts. The literacy rate in Chandpur is 58%, and less than 33% in Brahmanbaria, while the sewerage[3] coverage rates in the two districts are just 54% and 37%, respectively. In light of this, many of the youth group activities are directed to environmental issues, sanitation, and pollution, as well as awareness of violence against women and early marriage.

These activities take place in Multipurpose Community Learning Centres (MCLC) called gonokendros. The MCLC provides access to education for all people living in the region (children, men and women both young and old, the disabled, poor, illiterate, quasi-illiterate, etc.), though young people make up most of the beneficiaries.

BANGLADESH

NEPAL
Saidpur
Rajshahi
Jamuna
Ganges
Dhaka
INDIA
INDIA
Khulna
Barisal
Chittagong
Bay of Bengal
MYANMAR
50 km
OCHA

Map Sources: UNCS, ESRI, Natural Earth.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Sep 2013.

1 UNPF. World Population Dashboard. https://www.unfpa.org/ (Accessed February 2019)
2 ILO. ILOSTAT. http://www.ilo.org/ (Accessed March 2019)
3 This refers to facilities commonly found in rural areas; these are different from systems in urban centres, which include waste water and excretion facilities.

Description of activities

The youth committee established at each MCLC acts as a system to enable local young people to participate actively in the planning of activities. Some 30 to 50% of the youth members are women. The committee works on campaigns to raise awareness of social and environmental issues to promote local sustainable development. It also plans cultural activities and events. Below are some specific examples of their initiatives.

1. Skills development training to address local issues
2. Raising awareness of social issues
3. Training related to life skills, e.g., in agriculture, information technology
4. Tree-planting in haors (flood lakes that appear in and after the rainy season) to protect against landslides
5. Cultural and sporting events
6. Medical camps
7. Operation of libraries for locals, including mobile libraries

CASE 1

Destruction of the natural environment was a serious problem in the Brahmanbaria District. The youth committee therefore set up a separate subcommittee that also includes local people who are not committee members. Jointly, the two committees have planned and implemented numerous educational activities aimed at environmental protection. For example, in the haor region, two reserves were set up to protect the migratory birds that fly through in winter from hunting. At the same time, the youth group has conducted educational activities by creating documentary films, holding demonstrations, and setting up venues for discussion. All these activities have borne fruit, raising awareness of environmental protection amongst the local people. And migratory birds are no longer sold for food in local markets.

CASE 2

In Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, gender gap and the male-dominated nature of many traditional customs and practices are major social problems. Early marriages and the practices of "Eve teasing" (sexual harassment of women in public) and marriage dowries[4] are deeply ingrained throughout society. The reported incidence of these practices has generally fallen, as a result of the youth committee's efforts to promote understanding about the harm that they have inflicted on individuals and on communities as a whole.

4 This is a payment made at the time of marriage by the bride's family to the groom's family. In many cases, families find it necessary to sell land or home to meet the expected payment. In some cases, wives are subjected to violence or unilaterally divorced as a result of dissatisfaction with the dowry.

photo credit : BRAC

2. Case studies from India

The circumstances of young people

With its 1.35 billion people, India is the second most populous country in the world after China. The fact that 66% of India's population is defined as young (aged 35 or younger) means that one in five young people in the world is Indian. Although elementary school net enrolment rates[1] for boys and girls have risen to 97% and 98% respectively, these rates fall to 61% and 62% at secondary school level. The quality of education also remains an issue. Furthermore, there is a striking gender gap in employment, especially in rural areas where the unemployment rate of men is 3%, compared to 7% for women. In the 15-24 age range, the unemployment rate is 10%[2]. For the government of India, finding a solution to the rising unemployment and underemployment of the youth generation is an urgent challenge.

Project target area

The ACCU Youth Project activities in India are concentrated in Gujarat, in the country's western region. Agriculture is the main occupation of people living in this semi-arid water stressed area. Irrigation though available, is not adequate to support the farmers, and agricultural methods that depend on the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers are also threatening the sustainability of the region. While drinking water systems are set up by the government, water availability is unstable. As a result, women are often compelled to spend a large part of their day to fetch water taking away productive hours and time they could use for their families.

INDIA

Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Map created in Sep 2013.

1 This figure is calculated by dividing the number of students of school age range by the total number of children of the same age range. It cannot exceed 100%.

2 UNPF. World Population Dashboard. https://www.unfpa.org/ (Accessed February 2019)

Description of activities

ACCU's partner in the Youth Project, the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), supports activities aimed at improving people's lives utilizing the natural resources of Gujarat state. Additionally, they focus on strengthening local governance and promoting participation in decision-making processes and economic activities, particularly through the empowerment of women.

CASE 1

In addition to the use of natural resources and biodiversity, the environmental "Eco Club" set up and operated by CEE in the district of Rajkot has concentrated its efforts on the role of young people in the governance of the village. Despite the fact that the head of the local self-governing organization, known as "Sarpanch", was traditionally decided by nomination, club members who had received training demanded a democratic election for the position. One of the group members then won an overwhelming victory in the election and assumed responsibility for leading the local self-governing organization. The first initiative he tackled as Sarpanch was aimed at improving the environment of the village to enhance the quality of life. Work was done to restore existing water storage facilities to make it easier for villagers to access water. The biodiversity park created in the common area of the village made it possible to not only raise environmental awareness amongst villagers, but also to prepare traditional medicines using plants, and make them available to local people.

CASE 2

One youth group has created a platform for giving women a voice and promoted the participation of women in local governance and decision-making processes. Furthermore, it provides women with opportunities to improve their life skills so that they can learn new technologies. The group is also launching a Small Savings Group to produce and sell over 100 different products such as fruit drinks and beauty products in collaboration with similar groups in neighbouring villages, with the aim of improving living standards.

photo credit：CEE

3. Case studies from the Philippines

The circumstances of young people

The Philippines is a nation of about 100 million people, consisting of 7,107 islands, large and small. With more than 100 ethnic groups, it is also very multicultural, though Malays are the main ethnicity. Young people aged 10 to 24 make up 29% of the population. Historically, young people have played a very important role in the development of the nation, for example in the movement for independence from the great powers of the 19th century and in the anti-dictatorship movement of the 1970s and 1980s. For this reason, young people are considered important to national development in the Philippines. However, large numbers of children drop out of secondary education due to poverty and a lack of motivation, and even many of those that continue at school end up unemployed or underemployed due to the divergence between what they learn and what the job market demands. On top of all this, HIV/AIDS infection, unwanted pregnancies, smoking, and alcohol and drug abuse amongst youth are serious social problems.

Project target area

Youth groups here are active in the province of Benguet (division of Luzon in the northern Philippines) and in the province of Samar (division of Eastern Visayas within central Philippines). Benguet is home to several indigenous groups collectively referred to as "Igorots". Their main source of income is from mountain farming. A programme of ACCU's partner organization PILCD (People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development) brings together local youths who do not attend school to form a network and pursue a variety of activities. Samar Province, on the other hand, is becoming more urbanized, and in addition to its fisheries and agriculture, commerce is also thriving. Here, through the same PILCD programme, young people with disabilities are working together as a group.

Description of activities

The activities in the two provinces with PILCD are focused on providing young people with training related to leadership and governance, climate change, disaster mitigation, and functional literacy. In both cases, the aim is to improve the knowledge and skills of the young people who participate, and to cultivate the awareness and attitude to enable them to become "agents of change" in their respective localities. Below are some examples of the activities initiated by the youths in their communities after their training.

CASE 1

Many young people in the province of Benguet drop out of school for reasons relating to poverty or out of boredom or weariness, putting them at increased risk of developing antisocial behaviour. Drug and alcohol abuse amongst youths who do not go to school has become a social problem. The youth groups in this area offer young people a place to engage in music, art, sports, and other creative activities. At the same time, by providing training in natural disaster preparation and mitigation, and promoting participation in activities to raise awareness about climate change, the youth groups aim to cultivate local human resources that contribute to local sustainability.

CASE 2

The group in Samar province is a city-wide organization consisting of both youth and adults with disabilities. Around half of the 71 members are aged between 25 and 35. As facilitators, the members identify local natural disaster risks and develop activities to raise local awareness about preparing for disasters and planning emergency response measures. The group has also mapped out exactly where all disabled people live within the 12 target zones.

photo credit : PILCD

The power of learning and networking

Over the weekend of November 10 and 11, 2018, ACCU hosted a youth forum jointly with the Itabashi Board of Education at the city's lifelong learning facility. The forum was attended by representatives of ACCU's partner NGOs from four Asian countries that have worked on the Youth Project, as well as young people who have participated in local youth group activities. Also participating were people from four organizations involved in sustainable local development in various parts of Japan, three organizations working in and around Itabashi (the area of Tokyo where the forum was held), and invited experts from UNESCO Bangkok and other international organizations. The forum participants engaged in a lively discussion on the themes of "sustainability", "youth", and "community development", exchanging case studies and information transcending international borders and language barriers.

What is a sustainable world or community?

The Youth Forum participants, who come from a diversity of socioeconomic conditions and cultural backgrounds, and who face very different social issues, began by sharing their particular understanding of the concept of "sustainability". The participants explored big questions— like "What does 'nobody left behind' mean?", "What is a sustainable world?" and "What is a sustainable community?"— expressing their own ideas and listening to the opinions of others in a world café-style setting. Like this, the forum offered participants an opportunity to think deeply about how the local issues they have worked on, issues in other parts of the world, and global-scale development issues are all connected to each other.

While on one hand, there was conceptual discussion, typified by comments like "Society, economy and environment should function in a balanced and circulatory way and culture too should be protected", "At each level, from the individual, to family, community, country, and world...", there were also comments that shifted the focus more to the connection between people and between people and systems, as typified by comments such as "I feel resistance to the negative expression 'left behind'", "We have to go beyond idealistic theory and think about linking visions and ideas to policy", "Respecting diversity in each locality", and "It's important to foster human empathy." These comments from a variety of viewpoints added depth to the discussion.

Thinking about the next action

In between the forum sessions for mutual learning and field visits, each group was also given time to reflect on its own activities. As part of this process, three thematic groups were set up to discuss issues that participants have identified from their activities — "networking", "new value creation", and "sustainability of community development activities". There was lively discussion on these topics and various interesting comments. It was pointed out, for example, that when using social media for networking, roles should be assigned to everyone, with awareness of information gaps and language issues, and also that when trying to create new value, it is essential that the promotional efforts of various "actors" to enhance the appeal of a local area is linked to policy. It was also suggested that to ensure the sustainability of activities, inputs, e.g. financial and human resources, and processes, e.g. participation and leadership, should be linked both at the local and global levels.

The Youth Forum closed on a lively note with presentations of the action plans of each group based on an outlook of 1, 5, and 10 years into the future, and an exchange of encouragement messages. It is hoped that through the encounters and learnings at the forum, the young participants who are tackling the challenge of sustainable community development will continue to move on with a more global perspective, and at the same time share and discuss their experiences through networking, for example using the social media groups that they launched independently out of the thematic group discussion.

◆ Organizations that participated in the forum (in alphabetical order):

Ambitious Network (Aichi Pref., Japan) / BRAC (Bangladesh) / Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) (India) / CLC Youth Forum by CIVIC Foundation (Bangladesh) / JAE (Osaka Pref., Japan) / Japan Workers' Co-operative Union (Tokyo, Japan) / Minzemi (Tokyo, Japan) / Oki Dozen Education Miryokuka Project (Shimane Pref., Japan) / Peace Schole (Tokyo, Japan) / People's Initiative for Learning and Community Development (PILCD) (Philippines) / Sanjh Preet Organization (Pakistan) / Toke NGO Breath Sovereignty Movement (Chiba Pref., Japan)

III Youth Project

What is the ACCU Youth Project that began in 2014 about? To answer this question, let us look at how the project initially came to life, introducing the implementation method that was employed mainly in Pakistan. The importance of active participation by young people in community development and the processes for achieving this will also be reviewed below.

Project overview

2014
Partnered with Sanjh Preet Organization to start a pilot project in Pakistan
International symposium held in Lahore, Pakistan (December)

2015
BRAC (Bangladesh) participates in Youth Project
"Learning Steps" developed

YOUTH CHANGES THE WORLD

2016
CEE (India), PILCD (Philippines) participate in Youth Project
"Learning Steps (ver.2)" developed, incorporating a futurology perspective

2018
Youth Forum held (November)

Background and rationale

The importance of youth participation in peace and mutual understanding was referred to at the United Nations as early as the 1960s. In 1985, the "International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace" resolution was enacted, reconfirming the importance of youth participation in socioeconomic development. A look at international trends in education clearly shows that young people are also strongly emphasized in the context of ESD. In fact, the Aichi-Nagoya Declaration adopted by the World Conference on ESD in 2014 and the Global Action Programme (GAP), the successor programme of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), identify youth as one of the priority action areas for ESD.
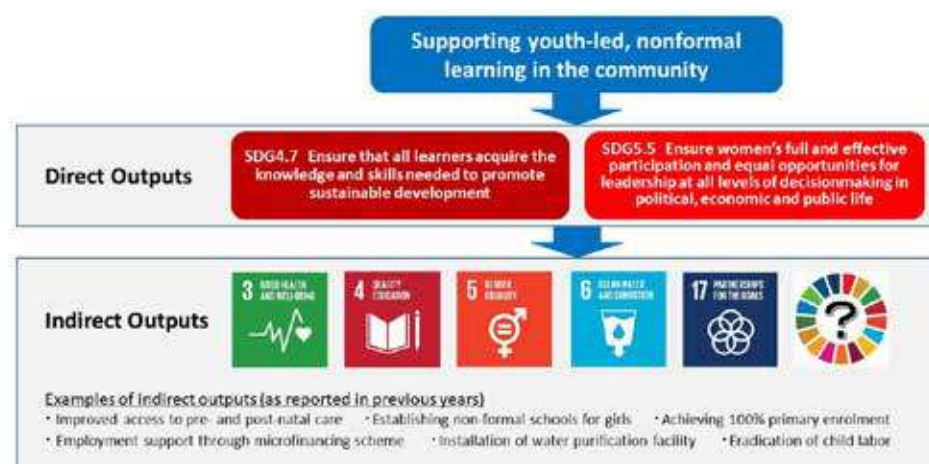
Thus, to deal with global sustainability, young people capable of understanding specific local issues and intently tackling them as stakeholders are indispensable. In the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed to be met by 2030, the focus also lies on mobilizing young people, important members of society, as a driving force, and on promoting international initiatives as well as grassroots-level initiatives which contribute to resolving specific local issues.

Purpose

The purpose of the Youth Project is to foster "agents of change" to create sustainable communities through the self-motivated learning of young people. After the piloting experience in 2014, the project has been implemented in various locations in South and Southeast Asia over five years. The main focus of the project is to encourage youths to come together to form groups in rural areas, to identify issues that local communities are facing through proactive initiatives like conducting baseline surveys, and to provide technical and financial support until specific action is taken to resolve the issues.

The implementation of the Youth Project helps to achieve SDG4 Quality Education ("Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all") and

Youth-led Sustainable Community Development × SDGs

SDG5 Gender Equality ("Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"). More specifically, we aim to ensure that "all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development", as described in SDG4.7, by assisting young people promote community-based non-formal learning. At the same time, in South Asian countries where the gender gap is particularly wide, we try to help "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership", as described in SDG5.5, by actively promoting the participation of women as well as men in community activities. This approach is also likely to have indirect benefits in other areas of development.

Method

For the Youth Project, we created a tool to help young people proactively engage in local community development, based on proven educational development methodologies. The tool was developed through consultation with representatives of partner NGOs from different countries, specialists from international institutions and universities, and other experts. In the project, we refer to the learning required for social transformation as a "learning step".

Learning Steps

1 SEE
The point of departure is asking the questions "When do you feel happy?" and "In what kind of community can people live happily?" What is the connection between individual happiness and the sustainability of a local community? In the process of seeking answers to this question, we learn about the three pillars of sustainability—environment, economy, and society—and we consider the importance of culture and education as a means of supporting these pillars. We also go back and forth between the past, which shapes the present, and the future, which we are heading for, to incorporate a futurological perspective that looks ahead in specific directions with a more realistic vision.

2 THINK & PLAN
Next, we look at ways to resolve specific issues that we are facing today. Putting a village development plan or other idea into a specific form is an effective way to enlist the cooperation of other stakeholders.

3 ACT
This is the start of actual activity. It is impossible to solve many local issues only with youth groups. The key to success is to work at influencing a variety of stakeholders and make effective use of local human and financial resources.

4 EVALUATE
Did the activity have the intended outcomes? It is also necessary to assess the sustainability of the results themselves. Along with the autonomy of activities, it is necessary to consider cooperation with national and local governments to make sure changes are not merely temporary.

5 SHOWCASE
Spreading the benefits and making them known to people in the community is an important step to ensure continued support for activities and to obtain understanding for the next stage.

The role of young people in creating a sustainable community

Kiichi Oyasu, Director of Education Cooperation Department
Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO

This booklet is focused mainly on young people actively engaged in promoting sustainable community development in Pakistan. What is a sustainable community and society? In Japan and many other countries, prosperity is typically associated with increased income, advanced infrastructure and social services such as roads, water supplies, electricity, medical care and education, and the state of being able to spend, consume, and enjoy entertainment. Economic development and the construction of infrastructure planned and executed by governments and development agencies is expected to transform "rural areas" into "urban areas" and "developing countries" into "developed countries". On the other hand, the negative side of materialistic economic development has manifested in the form of pollution problems, fading tradition and cultural heritage, and widening disparity. It is now evident, therefore, that what is really required is a balanced form of development that also considers environment, society, and culture.

In order to become affluent while maintaining the positive characteristics of a community, the local people must play a leading role in development. This is in accordance with the approaches advised by development expert Robert Chambers, "putting the first last" and the point made by social education scholar Makoto Suemoto that "the staff are co-runners." The booklet relates the stories of young people who responded to a call from outside, presenting examples of how they investigated local problems and took action to resolve them, by carefully examining local conditions and making visible the diversity, resources, and issues they found through maps, tables, and lists, to raise awareness of the issues. "Evidence-based policy making and planning" may be an ordinary or common method, but in the implementation of real-world projects, the intentions of political forces and government bodies and the ideas and preconceptions of prominent members of the local community often exert a significant influence. The foundation and feature of this project is action

taken only after opinions are gathered through discussions with local stakeholders based on accurate information.

It has been said the main players in local revitalization initiatives are "young people", "outsiders", and "fools". According to Asami Shikida, what is common to all these categories is that they are not necessarily bound by the conventions, norms, and traditions of a locality. Young people are less experienced in society and more sensitive to new information and social changes. Outsiders have crossed the border from another territory, so they are able to offer different viewpoints and values. The fools are those people capable of understanding, cooperating, and acting together on the innovative thinking and views of young people and outsiders, of their own accord, without being bound by "common sense".

The story of Kalsoom in Pakistan recounts how she established herself in an independent livelihood through learning after experiencing early marriage and divorce. We also saw how she internalized the inspiration of an outsider, to transform her way of life. Rehana, who works together with Kalsoom, is a teacher at a non-formal school. The two women explained how attending a meeting in Lahore together made them feel that they had pushed 'open a heavy door'. As well as obtaining new knowledge by physically crossing the village border, making a presentation in front of a large audience and interacting with outside people, the confidence they derived from this experience served as a driving force for continuing their work and overcoming the invisible norms and barriers they faced after their return to the village.

Rehana's father, who is understanding and supportive of her activities, might be considered a "fool" from the viewpoint of the village's traditional value system. Similarly, Najma's father and uncle, who support her work as a teacher at a non-formal school, understand the needs of girls' education and assist Najma's youth group. They too have

dared to defy the "conventional wisdom" that has been a barrier to local revitalization.

Perhaps it may be difficult to understand how Azam's Islamic belief that a person's actions in this world determine their fate in the next life led him to participate in the Youth Project. But despite having a disability, he believed that rather than being pessimistic about the present life and considering himself to be a welfare recipient, engaging enthusiastically in community development would lead to a better future for himself and his afterlife. As he moves around the village in his wheelchair collecting data to analyse and using this to argue for the importance of education, he has become a role model. He has managed to increase his circle of friends and colleagues and to expand connections with supporters and the people of the village.

Although the community development initiatives start out largely with young people, they are not the only people carrying out activities. Other people and organizations both within and outside the local community are involved in various ways. Making connections with a variety of people and organizations amplifies the action and creates a ripple effect. These "connections" are indispensable for effective project implementation. Although Hamad's parents were unable to go to school, they were still very interested in education, and because of this Hamad also began supporting a local primary school. The youth group formed by Hamad even came to serve as a mediator for disputes in the village. The fact that Naseem, the leader of the women's group, is Hamad's wife serves as a positive example of female empowerment, by stimulating reflection on the respective gender roles of men and women and their traditional discrepancies.

The stimulus behind the launch of youth activities in Pakistani villages was an encounter with Sanjh Preet, an "outsider" for villagers. Sanjh Preet Organization was established in 1996 as an NGO aiming at social welfare and development through education, with connections to development organizations inside and outside the country. The organization asked itself: How can we encourage people in villages, especially young people, to develop a greater awareness of their specific problems and issues, without getting stuck in preconceptions? According to the Sanjh Preet representative Pervaiz Akhtar, after a planning meeting with ACCU, the project aimed at collecting basic information and then using this to engage the people of the village in fact-based discussion, and

thus encourage their proactive participation in project activities. The idea was that making young people protagonists would lead to action by local people and to social transformation.

People's participation is considered as a continuous process rather than dichotomy, as suggested by Sherry Arnstein, who compared it to a ladder, and Toru Sato, who compared it to an elevator. There are various stages involved, from influence and mobilization by outsiders, and sometimes forced participation, to self-determination, cooperation in building partnerships, all the way to self-governing autonomy. For any collaboration of government bodies, NGOs, and experts with local people to work effectively, various questions need to be considered, like how to establish common goals and aims, how to build an equitable relationship, and how free the relationship should be. Rather than deciding everything by majority vote, when trying to pursue initiatives with local guidance, it is necessary to form agreements and formulate plans through discussion and learning, without being unduly influenced by powerful members of the community.

For Najma, who heads the women's group in the village of Chah Wahab, it was very hard for people to change their long-established belief, manners and customs. A process that involves education and learning, as well as establishing and maintaining discipline is important for achieving any positive changes. The process of gathering basic information was not merely a matter of collecting data. It was also a learning process of the village people to recognize the circumstances of their community, understand the situation of the village and its diversity, identify the problems that needed to be tackled, and become aware of their limitations. By creating an environment in which traditionally marginalized members of the community can actively participate, in particular girls and people with disabilities, they cultivated positivity both for individuals and the community as a whole.

On the other hand, linking NGO support and community-based initiatives with public administration and connecting them to policies which guarantee and implement the right to learn remains a big challenge. It is essential for practitioners to influence local and central governments, as well as development agencies, so that the responsibility for assuring primary education and literacy as basic rights can be guaranteed nationally. These fundamental human rights should not permanently

be dependent on community self-help and mutual aid, or support from external organizations.

At the Youth Forum in Itabashi, Tokyo in November 2018, young people who were engaged in community development from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, and Japan, gathered together for an international exchange that transcended their own particular social contexts. They discussed the roles of individuals and organizations, focusing on linking local sustainability efforts to global sustainability, reflecting on their own strengths and weaknesses and asking the question, "What should be done to create our common future?" There was debate about recognizing diversity within local communities as well as transnational diversity, and on the fact that sustainability implies not only maintaining and preserving current conditions, but also a need to create new value in response to local changes, with a global perspective.

For ACCU, which organized the forum in Itabashi and put together the whole project, the main purpose of the Youth Project is not to enlighten the young people of other countries about sustainable societies and ESD. It does not aim to engage in international cooperation by imparting Japan's advanced case studies either. Rather, it aims to offer opportunities for local stakeholders to expand their awareness, transcend the barriers of traditional customs and norms, and think and act on the possibilities of future directions from both local and global perspectives, as well as propose projects that sustain dialogues and

facilitate such opportunities. Although not a local stakeholder, ACCU is able to provide an "outsider's" perspective and play the role of promoting a learning network by connecting various stakeholders and offering an opportunity to think and learn about sustainability from diverse perspectives.

International cooperation initiatives, especially projects for supporting developing countries, are often time and budget bound and require an exit plan. The reason is that after the project ends, the side receiving support is expected to continue the activity by itself, independently. In this project, the creation of a network was proposed by participants including ACCU, transcending the standpoints and barriers of the supporting side and receiving side. To enable this option, a platform for information exchange using social media was set up. The exit strategy here could be said to be the generation of new initiatives and projects by utilizing the network to build equitable partnerships and utilizing external relationships as resource. Independence does not necessarily mean assuming responsibility for everything without relying at all on others. Rather, as Hayao Kawai suggests, it means avoiding isolation and building relationships in which we can rely on one another while acknowledging our own limitations. Consequently, we should promote advocacy with the view of linking our efforts with national policy. We believe that we can create a sustainable society through the connections between local, national and global level coordinators and organizations and the mutual learning among us.

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Kiichi Oyasu

Kiichi Oyasu worked at the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (current MEXT) until taking office at UNESCO Bangkok as a Programme Specialist in Literacy in 1992. He then moved on to assume the post of Programme Specialist in Education at UNESCO Dhaka Office in Bangladesh from November 2008. From July 2016 to June 2018, he taught at Okayama University as a professor of the Center for Global Partnerships and Education, until he took his current position at ACCU. Visiting fellow of Okayama University. Ph.D.

ACCU expands the circle of learning with Japan and the people of the world

Since it was founded in 1971, the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU) has worked in cooperation with UNESCO and other international organizations on education and cultural initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region, to promote human resource development and mutual exchanges. Since 2015, through a multifaceted collaboration with UNESCO as a key partner in its GAP (ESD Global Action Programme), we have contributed significantly on numerous projects.

Key Partner
UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development

ACCU
Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO

Promoting ESD in school education

Under the guidance of UNESCO, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is being tackled worldwide. ACCU provides support for whole-school approach to ESD by holding training sessions and workshops. Also, as the secretariat for the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) in Japan, we are helping to connect schools with international initiatives.

Promoting community-based learning for sustainability

ACCU supports youth-led sustainable community development initiatives and implements a variety of ESD projects rooted in local communities, to help people tackle community development activities aimed at creating a more sustainable future for themselves. In Japan, we collaborate with Kominkan and other non-formal education institutions, to support community-based learning through joint government-citizen action.

Supporting basic education and literacy

ACCU implements the SMILE*Asia project, a literacy programme focused on maternal and child health. In addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, students learn about health, sanitation, and other life skills-related matters. Since 2008, this initiative has focused largely on Cambodia, and we continue to collaborate there with local NGOs with a view to cooperating on policy measures.

∗ Supporting Maternal and Child Health Improvement and Building Literate Environments

Promoting international understanding through education and cultural exchange

ACCU offers international exchange programmes for primary and secondary school teachers and staffs (by dispatch and invitation), aimed at promoting mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and other countries. During the one-week programme, participants visit educational and cultural facilities in various regions, and interact with local staff and students. The aim is to provide a platform for participants to transform themselves as they deepen their understanding of different cultures and multiculturalism.

Fostering next-generation global leaders

ACCU is working together with the Japan Committee for Global Classrooms to conduct "model UN conferences", with the goal of cultivating next-generation international citizens and global leaders. As well as co-hosting the All Japan Educational Model United Nations since 2012 as a secretariat, we send the most outstanding team from the competition to the international competition at the UN Headquarters.

Cultural heritage protection

At the Cultural Heritage Protection Cooperation Office in Nara (ACCU Nara Office), we collaborate with international organizations to conduct study, training and international conferences aimed at fostering human resources to work on the protection of cultural heritage and the conservation and restoration of cultural properties. We also offer classes on demand to high schools in Nara prefecture, as well as seminars for the general public.

https://www.accu.or.jp/jp/en/index.html

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Records of youth-led sustainable community development initiatives