

## Active Citizens

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# Leading change in a changing world

2020/21

Globally connected,  
locally engaged



# WELCOME

**I recently had the privilege of hosting a virtual session with Malala Yousafzai, the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize recipient, where we talked about how to support the next generation of female activists – and inspire the next Malala or Greta Thunberg. My thoughts turned immediately to Active Citizens and its ability to empower and galvanise young people globally.**

**To see this power in action, we only need to look at how Active Citizens have tackled the challenges of the past year. When the world went into global lockdown, stories began to emerge of Active Citizens taking the initiative to support communities through the pandemic. We launched the #ConnectedByAction campaign to give a voice to Active Citizens carrying out important social action globally.**

These stories really do show what it means to be an Active Citizen. They are stories of strength and resilience, of people taking the initiative to provide vital support to communities, from life-saving supplies and information, to access to education and mental health support. They are stories of adaptability and resourcefulness, of finding new ways to reach those in need. And they are stories of hope and positivity, of communities galvanising through the toughest times.

Adaptability has also characterised the way the programme has connected with partners, participants and communities during the pandemic. As face-to-face interactions became impossible, Active Citizens embraced a new digital and distance learning approach, to continue to connect communities with the learning journey.

The past year has also seen Active Citizens collaborating globally like never before, as they use the online platforms that have become vital to build connections in a COVID-19 world to plan and deliver social action across physical borders. We've also seen more young people – from university students, to young artists and activists – use Active Citizens as a springboard to tackle the issues they care most about.

For example, Active Citizens is playing a role in supporting young people globally to take action on climate change, just as the UK prepares to host the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, in November 2021.

So much has happened since we celebrated the ten years of Active Citizens in 2019, and the vital social action that has continued over the past year is testament to the strength of the thriving Active Citizens global community. We can be sure that whatever we do face in 2021, this community of committed young Active Citizens will be developing creative solutions and rising to the challenge.

**Kate Ewart-Biggs OBE**  
**Interim Chief Executive, British Council**

**1 global programme**  
**connecting 1,408 partner**  
**organisations in 78 countries**  
**who have trained 10,960**  
**facilitators who have empowered**  
**323,719 Active Citizens to**  
**launch 13,586 social action**  
**projects to benefit**  
**communities worldwide.**

The Active Citizens community is constantly growing.  
Check [www.britishcouncil.org/activecitizens](http://www.britishcouncil.org/activecitizens) for the latest figures.

What is Active Citizens?

# Active Citizens don't wait for change to happen...

...they drive the change themselves. Active Citizens is a social leadership training programme that equips people with the skills and tools to tackle the big global challenges and build a more open and inclusive world.

## How it works

Our **global network of partners** are the bridge to local communities. They are diverse, from civil society organisations, to universities, to local councils, and are all connected by a passion for positive change.

Partners nominate people to be trained as **facilitators** – chosen for their wealth of experience in connecting and working with communities. They take the Active Citizens learning journey into local communities to empower people through training and mentorship.

Those trained by facilitators become **Active Citizens** – people equipped with the skills and tools to mobilise others to tackle local, regional, national and global issues. They do this through **social action**.

## The power of social action

Change in the community works best when it is led by the community. Active Citizens use social action to inspire and mobilise local people, from civil society groups and students to business owners and local government, to work together to tackle key issues and make communities more resilient, cohesive, inclusive and sustainable.

## One global community

Active citizens are connected by their passion for social action and for making the world a better place. As well as connecting at global events and initiatives, to share and be inspired, they also collaborate globally online, using virtual platforms and tools to plan and deliver social action.



# The Learning Journey

All Active Citizens, from facilitators to local participants, follow a **powerful learning journey known as the river.**

As they travel along the river, they build self-awareness and confidence, learn how to value the needs and perspectives of others, and deepen their understanding of the different systems that make up today's interdependent world.

This process inspires them to engage peacefully with others and bring about lasting change.

#### **Adaptable and flexible**

Active Citizens continues to be adapted to meet the needs of different individuals and diverse communities. There have been successful examples of thematic innovation building on Active Citizens core content across social enterprise, youth, the arts, sport, mainstreaming gender and disability, different educational settings and blended and distance learning. Active Citizens can work at scale through a variety of funding models and as a key component of wider initiatives, partnering with civil society organisations, social enterprises, arts institutions, local and national governance structures and educational institutions.

## The river

The river flows along four stages, and participants can stop at, and revisit, these stages as required throughout their journey.

## Me

Understanding ourselves: improving self-awareness and confidence; valuing different perspectives.

## Me and you

Building relationships with others: learning how to use dialogue as a tool for building empathy, trust and understanding.

## We

Improving understanding of communities: developing an understanding of how the community 'works'; learning how to identify interventions for addressing community issues and improving the motivation to act.

## Social action

Planning a social action project in the community: this could be something new or it could build on an existing initiative; delivering social action using improved social responsibility and leadership skills.



# The journey to 2020/21

**A lot has happened since Active Citizens celebrated ten years of social action, in November 2019. Here we look at some of the programme highlights in the lead-up to, and during, the pandemic.**



## Ten years of social action

Active Citizens celebrated its ten-year anniversary and the incredible milestone of more than 11,000 social action projects by bringing people from across the network together to share their stories. We marked the occasion with a public exhibition at the British Council in London, which showcased the amazing work done by Active Citizens globally over the last decade.



## Embedding Active Citizens in educational settings

Due to the increasing demand from universities to incorporate Active Citizens into their learning offers, we developed a new toolkit for embedding Active Citizens in educational settings. Launching in 2021, it has the potential to empower even greater numbers of students to become the next generation of change makers and develop valuable skills for when they enter the job market.



## Reaching new communities

In 2019, Venezuela became the 78th country to welcome Active Citizens, as we established new partnerships to empower marginalised young people through creativity. And both Ireland and Cyprus have come on board in 2021. As we reach more countries, we also give our UK partners more opportunities to increase their global presence through collaborative projects.



## Strengthening communities in the UK and South Asia

Research conducted by our evaluation partner INTRAC focused on the impact Active Citizens has had in the UK and South Asia.

In the **UK**, the research found that Active Citizens has directly contributed to community cohesion, by bringing people of different backgrounds together, who wouldn't normally connect. The programme also enabled people from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome personal challenges and improve their own life chances, while also being a force for positive good in their local communities through the delivery of social action. Participating in international events has also given young people life-changing experiences, by broadening their cultural horizons and introducing them to creative ways people globally are overcoming challenges in their communities.

In **South Asia**, where Active Citizens has now trained nearly 80,000 people, who have launched more than 4,000 social action projects, young people have built their confidence, motivation and skills, enabling them to become active community members. Social action projects have directly benefited communities, by improving livelihoods, providing new services, building resilience and strengthening civil society.



# Responding to **challenges** global

**With the challenges of 2020/21 being felt across societies globally, it became more difficult, but also more important than ever, to connect with communities and deliver positive social action. Our committed global network of partners and Active Citizens alumni have, of course, risen to this challenge.**

## Committing to climate change

Global challenges didn't stop for the pandemic, and neither did those Active Citizens who are committed to tackling them. As the UK prepares to host the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, in November 2021, we are supporting Active Citizens globally to tackle one of the most pressing global challenges for young people globally: climate change. Find out more about how Active Citizens are creating a more sustainable world on pages 36 to 43.



**'By creating connections across the Active Citizens network, and connecting people around the world working on the same issues, we can share learning and increase the motivation to act against climate change.'**

Joanne Kotelawala, Active Citizens facilitator, Sri Lanka

## #ConnectedByAction

As news continued to emerge about the COVID-19 pandemic, we started to receive stories of Active Citizens around the world who were leading the crisis response. We launched the global #ConnectedByAction campaign to give a voice to those Active Citizens using their skills, initiative and networks to support people through the pandemic, and to inspire others. Read about some of more than 80 projects we received from 21 countries, on pages 14 to 25.

## Designing new delivery approaches

As physical interactions became next-to-impossible, we needed to quickly find new ways to connect communities with the Active Citizens learning journey. Working with our network of global facilitators, we designed a digital and distance learning toolkit to deliver Active Citizens, built on inclusiveness. This adaptable model is now being used in communities as a solid reinforcement to face-to-face delivery. Find out more about our new delivery approach on pages 26 to 35.



In April 2020, news emerged about how Active Citizens from Superior University in **Pakistan** were supporting 30,000 families in rural communities, who didn't have access to services or information during COVID-19. Using a digital platform to locate and connect with families in dire need of support, they delivered vital food rations, medical supplies and other basic services. They also partnered with a local news channel, to raise awareness of the issue and to encourage people to respond with where help was most needed.

# #Connected By Action

As a result, we launched **#ConnectedByAction**, to give a global platform to these and other Active Citizens who have committed to supporting communities through COVID-19. The response has been immense, with stories emerging of how Active Citizens around the world have mobilised resources and communities in the fight against the pandemic.

Read about some of these stories over the next few pages.  
**Find more on Facebook using the hashtag #ConnectedByAction**



# Providing vital supplies

As the world went into global lockdown, it became even tougher to access essential supplies, especially for the most vulnerable. In many communities, Active Citizens led the response, connecting at-risk families and frontline staff with vital resources.



## Delivering to doorsteps

Across Rio de Janeiro, **Brazil**, groups of Active Citizens have supported those in urgent need of basic supplies, delivering food and hygiene products to the doorsteps of more than 3,000 families and distributing free face masks made by groups of local craftswomen.

In **Egypt**, food packages and financial relief secured by Active Citizens have helped families who've lost income in Ezbet Khairallah, an underprivileged and densely populated area of Cairo that already suffers from a shortage of public services and facilities.

One Active Citizen in **Sri Lanka** has taken the lead on helping women suffering from domestic abuse, female wage-earners and widows, whose situation has worsened due to lockdown. After garnering support from local government and businesses, she has provided food packages for 25 families and connected vulnerable women with local support providers.

### Securing basic rights

During the pandemic, adolescent girls in Rajshahi, **Bangladesh**, lost access to basic health and hygiene supplies, so Active Citizens from the local area have supplied them with sanitary products and vital hygiene information. To keep the project sustainable, they've also been selling fruit trees and flowering plants online, combining their joint commitment of protecting women's rights and improving the environment.

For street children in **Uganda**, who depend on the informal sector and trade to survive, the lockdown has left them stranded and facing starvation. Active Citizens have been working with local authorities to provide temporary living arrangements, where the children receive food, shelter and psychological support.



© Ko Thant Zin

### Supporting frontline staff

Active Citizens in **Ethiopia** and **Egypt** have used 3D printers to battle the pandemic, by producing protective medical equipment for frontline staff. In Ethiopia, where there is just one doctor for every 10,000 people, an Active Citizen co-ordinated efforts to produce face shields for health centres across the country. While in Egypt, more than 3,000 face shields have been produced for hospitals in need.

In Liverpool, **UK**, Active Citizens are supplying bicycles donated by the local community to NHS staff and key workers, so they can travel without using cars or public transport – keeping them both safe and healthy. The project is also helping to battle the negative effects of lockdown, by encouraging more people to enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of cycling.

### Galvanising communities

In **Indonesia**, Active Citizens are bringing communities together to support each other through the pandemic. In North Sumatra, where farmers have been unable to sell their harvested crops, damaging their livelihoods, Active Citizens have collected community donations to provide families with essential items.

In East Nusa Tenggara, Active Citizens have garnered community and government support to turn a dormitory building into a quarantine centre, with community members volunteering to cook fresh daily meals and the local government providing medical resources and staff.



© Abel Solomon



© NGO Territory of Participation



© The Hunger Project Bangladesh



**During the pandemic, we've seen how access to information can save lives,** and Active Citizens have been at the forefront to ensure communities are fully informed on how to stay healthy and stay safe.

# Sharing

## critical information

### Music for minorities

In Hull, **UK**, Active Citizens noticed how government health and safety messages were not reaching some black, Asian and minority ethnic communities due to language and cultural barriers. So, they started BAME vs COVID-19, bringing together musicians and music producers from ethnic communities to create songs in their own languages about how to stay safe during the pandemic, providing a critical source of information for many communities.

### Artistic announcements

In **Sudan**, young Active Citizens have used art to communicate ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 across Port Sudan. Their striking murals and illustrations now cover many walls in highly visible parts of the city, such as markets and health centres. These artistic announcements are not only reducing the burden on health services, but are keeping people safe and uplifting the community.

### Spreading the word

In **Brazil**, Active Citizens have utilised their existing networks to get potentially life-saving information into hard-to-reach communities, by distributing books and newspapers about how to prevent the spread of the virus.

In Odesa, **Ukraine**, more than 120 Active Citizens are part of a project bringing together 40 diverse organisations working to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through activities such as raising awareness of how to travel safely and delivering supplies to those in need.

In many rural communities in **Myanmar**, people find it hard to stay informed about the spread of the virus due to a lack of electricity and online access. To tackle this, a group of Active Citizens have used loudspeakers to spread public safety messages and distributing leaflets about how to prevent the spread of the virus. They've also supported these communities by distributing food, medicine and hand sanitiser, cooking meals for health workers and supporting the construction of a quarantine centre.





Global lockdown measures have had a big impact on how young people access education. When schools closed and education moved online, Active Citizens worked to keep students and teachers connected in the new online context.

# Continuing education



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## Supporting teachers

In **Pakistan**, Active Citizens launched an innovative series of Teacher Development Webinars to support teachers to deliver engaging lessons via online and blended approaches. The accompanying Facebook community is now more than 16,000-strong, enabling teachers around the world to connect and support each other to navigate new learning environments.

## Connecting learners

The move to virtual learning has made accessing education even more difficult in low-connectivity communities. On the Fordyce Estate, **Sri Lanka**, Active Citizens have worked to keep children in education, who would otherwise be working on tea plantations or as domestic staff to support their families' income. As the move to online learning increased drop-out rates, they've provided space for 50 students to continue their education.

Across **Morocco**, groups of Active Citizens have helped young people adapt to online learning. In Sefrou, Active Citizens secured a donation of 20 new smartphones for students at a school catering for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, giving them the means to connect safely from home and continue their education. In Guelmim, an Active Citizen and teacher has created an online space for students to connect and share their lockdown experiences. While another group have created online lessons, games and social activities to support students' mental health during lockdown.

Lockdown has given young learners in **Afghanistan** the opportunity to connect with learners from different backgrounds, who they normally wouldn't get the chance to meet. The initiative, started by a group of Active Citizens, has encouraged students to share letters of friendship and learning packages with each other, whilst also providing much-needed peer learning support and encouragement, to help them adapt to online learning.

# Supporting

For many, the pandemic and lockdown life has represented fear and isolation, and has negatively affected people's mental health. In response, **Active Citizens put their diverse skills to use by finding innovative ways of supporting people through lockdown.**

## people through lockdown

### Providing spaces of support

In **Mexico**, where seven in ten women have experienced some form of violence, lockdown has increased cases of gender-based violence. The Las Panas initiative, founded by an Active Citizen, has provided virtual spaces, podcasts and webinars to offer information and tangible support for those women affected.

With the support of local therapists, artists and DJs, Active Citizens partner AZIZA PECE Youth Programming has helped at-risk young people and young members of the LGBTQ+ community in Baltimore City, **USA**, to stay positive during the pandemic. They've provided a safe space for young people to discuss their experiences and feelings, as well as sessions to support emotional learning and address trauma and mental health through creative approaches.

### Sharing positivity

In the village of Pabaré, **Lithuania**, Active Citizens have helped families spend more leisure time together during lockdown, by supplying fun and educational board games.

Once each family has finished, the games are sent back, disinfected and passed on to the next family. The families involved have also been connected via social media to share their experiences.

As the **UK** made the important commitment to protect the elderly during the pandemic, Active Citizens partner Jack Drum Arts also vowed to help vulnerable and at-risk young people in South West Durham.

Through their #GoViral initiative, which offers a range of activities to support young peoples' mental health, they've hand-delivered arts and craft packs and offered online music-making and writing activities, to provide a welcome distraction from negative news and encourage families to stay home and save lives.



© NGO Territory of Participation

© Jack Drum Arts



# Designing new delivery approaches

**The spread of COVID-19 throughout the world accelerated the need to design more flexible ways of delivering Active Citizens. To do this, we drew on the knowledge of local facilitators, British Council staff, our master facilitators and the global Active Citizens team to design a new way of delivering the learning journey in places where physical interaction is limited. The result is a brand-new resource that supports the delivery of Active Citizens through a blended learning model, combining face-to-face, digital and distance learning approaches.**

## Increasing reach and accessibility

As well as helping us reach communities during lockdown, digital and distance learning has opened up opportunities to increase the reach and accessibility of training opportunities, especially in communities where physical interaction is limited. They can also help to connect Active Citizens around the world who are working on similar issues, providing them with peer support and fresh inspiration.

## Virtual together, virtual whenever, virtual forever

Facilitators can blend three types of activity according to the needs of their participants, including virtual together activities, where people come together to participate online at the same time, virtual whenever activities, where people participate in the same activity online in their own time, and virtual forever tasks that underpin the learning outcomes.

## Designed for inclusiveness

Given digital learning has many barriers to participation, including access, digital skills and confidence, we prioritise inclusiveness, by providing a safe learning environment that is sensitive to learners needs and where they feel supported to use a range of simple tools and platforms to achieve learning outcomes.

## Developing the approach

To develop the approach, we brought together 55 of our most experienced Active Citizens facilitators from across the world to share their experiences of blended learning, to give feedback on activities and to contribute to the creation of the new toolkit.

The event also included a training element, combining virtual together, virtual whenever and virtual forever tasks to build participants' capacity for designing and delivering virtual and distance learning approaches.

## The digital and distance learning toolkit

The result is a flexible learning resource, which facilitators can adapt to their local communities' needs and level of connectivity. The toolkit will support facilitators to design blended learning strategies, and offers tips and guidance to delivering digital and distance learning workshops.



**'We discovered that, even though, as individuals, we may be in distant spaces, we can still make that human connection.'**  
(Participant from Egypt)

**'Due to the pandemic, I didn't think I would be able to reconnect with communities, but this opportunity has not only reconnected me, but has given me new ways of connecting.'**  
(Participant from Pakistan)

**'It was important to me to realise that we all are in a similar situation and learning together the new ways we can face that reality.'**  
(Participant from Venezuela)





# Connecting low-connectivity communities

The flexibility of our digital and distance learning toolkit, which combines different blended approaches, can contribute towards **bridging the digital divide in many Active Citizens communities**. Here we look at three cases of the approach being adapted to low-connectivity contexts.

## Strengthening community cohesion in Syria

**In Syria, a blended learning approach was used to reach new communities. We speak to Sarah Debs, Programme Manager – Youth and Civil Society, British Council, Syria.**

### What context were you working in?

In the ten years since the civil uprising in Syria, Active Citizens has played an important role in strengthening community cohesion and resilience. Here, the programme is delivered by Mobaderoon, a network of activists who act as our bridge to local communities and adapt the learning journey to their needs.

In a context with already weak infrastructure, the pandemic has made it even more difficult to reach people through training and social action. Internet connections are expensive and unstable – your electricity can go down for hours without warning – so virtual training approaches need to take this into account.

**‘In places where physical interaction is limited, due to conflict and insecurity, we can still create safe spaces to empower people through Active Citizens.’**

Sarah Debs, Programme Manager – Youth and Civil Society, British Council, Syria

### What was the solution?

Together with Mobaderoon, we designed a series of blended workshops across different localities. In each locality, we provided a safe space for five people to gather with an Active Citizens facilitator, and each space had a screen to connect all localities via video, so participants could learn together.

To ensure equal access, we gave each participant an internet connection for the duration of the project, so they could complete virtual wherever tasks and stay connected with other trainees. We used tools that were less bandwidth intensive, but which still had features to engage people.

### What were the outcomes and key lessons?

While the participants had no prior experience of Active Citizens, they really engaged with the learning journey, thanks to the interactive tools and focus on relevant issues, such as social cohesion and identity.

The workshops also showed participants the true power of online tools, and as they continue their journey, they will explore how such tools can bring added dimensions to delivering social action and cascading their learning.

What really surprised us was the increased participation of women. We originally feared that societal norms and low digital literacy would hamper them, but the opposite was true. It's exciting to know that blended approaches can build women's capacity in tech and activism, which they can then cascade to others in their communities.

The blended approach really works in fragile contexts, where face-to-face contact is still crucial for building trust.

## Empowering football coaches in Nigeria

**In Nigeria, a distance learning approach was used to train Premier Skills Coach Educators on the Active Citizens learning journey. We speak to Dan Boyden, Active Citizens master facilitator.**

### What context were you working in?

As part of Active Citizens' partnership with Premier Skills, we planned training for a cohort of Nigerian Premier Skills Coach Educators, to see how they could enhance their use of football as a tool for change using the Active Citizens learning journey.

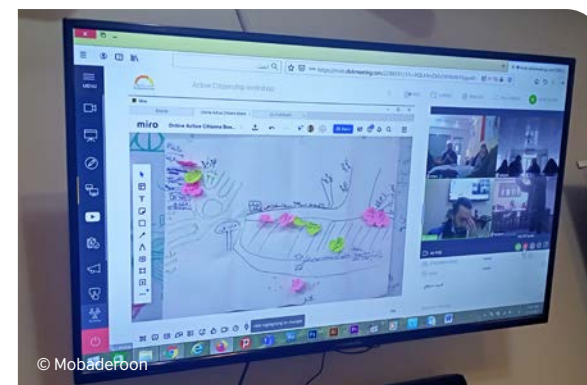
The pandemic put these plans at risk, by restricting our ability to travel and bring people together. So, we needed a more innovative approach, which could account for the different levels of connectivity and digital skills amongst participants.

### What was the solution?

We had a solid platform to start from, as we were building on existing relationships. The Coach Educators had all been through the Premier Skills journey together, and they already understood the needs and issues within their communities.

We decided on a virtual-only approach, based around five core online sessions, an online marketplace, to pitch ideas for social action, and a series of virtual whenever activities. The training was underpinned by WhatsApp, which meant participants always had a means to connect.

We needed to meet people where they were in terms of connectivity. Some couldn't connect with cameras, others only via chat. We even had some using their phones from the back of taxis. Whatever it took, we worked hard to overcome barriers to participation. It helped to have a dedicated tech role, who provided the scaffolding to the sessions by supporting people to connect and access tasks.



### What were the outcomes and key lessons?

We've seen that virtual tools can effectively support people through the Active Citizens learning journey, while also enhancing their digital skills and increasing their confidence to connect online. It's also shown the value of bringing the Active Citizens methodology to Premier Skills Coach Educators, and we are now starting to see fruitful social action come from that.

The network has really been re-galvanised. Through the training process, they built their resilience and resourcefulness, by connecting in an unfamiliar space, building their confidence and overcoming uncertainty, demonstrating the power of online tools in supporting people to navigate challenging situations.

**‘Online tools are great for supporting cross-cultural collaboration and learning. You can connect across physical boundaries, on a national or international scale, and apply that learning locally.’**

Dan Boyden, Active Citizens master facilitator, UK

After the training, the three Nigerian Active Citizens facilitators joined 25 other facilitators, from five counties across Sub-Saharan Africa, at an online Facilitator Development Workshop, which showed how virtual learning can support connections at scale and accelerate cross-cultural learning in a way that would be more difficult to do face to face.

*Premier Skills is an international partnership between the British Council and the Premier League, which uses football to build brighter futures for young people around the world. In Nigeria, the Premier Skills programme helped bring together stakeholders to deliver an innovation of the Premier Skills approach, incorporating Active Citizens.*





Connecting low-connectivity communities

# Reconnecting communities in Colombia

**‘Barriers to connectivity inspired us to be creative, to distil the learning journey into something that could essentially be delivered via WhatsApp and still be engaging and locally relevant.’**

Daniela Mutis, Head of Inclusive Communities, British Council, Colombia

**In Colombia, a distance learning approach was used to connect with women in rural communities. We speak to Daniela Mutis, Head of Inclusive Communities, British Council, Colombia.**

## What context were you working in?

Through our partnership with the Colombian government to help rebuild the social fabric damaged during the armed conflict, we launched a project to give former women members of the FARC-EP (the people’s army during the conflict) opportunities to reintegrate and reconnect with their communities, across 16 territories.

As COVID-19 had made travelling into rural territories all but impossible, we needed to innovate to find ways of reaching and building trust with these women in their communities, from a distance.

## What was the solution?

We designed a virtual learning model, accounting for the varying levels of internet connectivity and participants’ digital skills. There were some territories with no internet connectivity at all, which meant exploring solutions using phone and text.

We worked with local tutors to adapt content and delivery modes to the needs of each territory, focusing on easily accessible and shareable formats such as podcast and video. These tutors drew on their experience and creativity to distil key concepts into bite-sized, easy-to-consume content, weaving in local music, imagery and metaphors.

Critical to the project were our group of ‘Mujeres Dinamizadoras’ (‘energising women’), who acted as the bridge to communities and used local connections to build trust and increase motivation. To boost participation, we also provided the participants with tablets to access content and connect in their own time.

## What were the outcomes and key lessons?

The women felt empowered through the training process. It reinforced existing relationships, as many chose to come together physically to participate, and they have maintained those connections since the training.

The tablets not only helped to increase participants’ digital skills but enhanced their sense of participation and supported interaction, by enabling the women to see other faces.

While virtual delivery certainly provided flexibility in terms of timescales, enabling different territories to travel along the journey at their own pace, it’s important not to forget the power of face-to-face contact, which is vital for building trust amongst groups, and between facilitators and participants.

British Council Colombia and the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN)  
Project name: Community Actions Focused on Gender and Rights of Women (Phase I)  
Date of photo: March 2020



# The first ever Virtual International Study Visit took place at the start of 2021, bringing together over 50 Active Citizens and facilitators from 16 countries to connect virtually, share approaches and plan new social action to tackle both COVID-19 and climate change.

## Connecting the global community

With face-to-face meetings off the agenda, the first Virtual International Study Visit gave experienced facilitators and newly trained Active Citizens the chance to strengthen their connections with the global Active Citizens community.

Three groups participated in online workshops, where they shared stories of change, explored identity and culture, and collaborated on ideas for social action through virtual platforms.

Outside of the sessions, they continued to connect via WhatsApp, and worked in smaller groups to plan collaborative projects that could be shared with the wider group.

## Sharing social action

During the workshops, participants got the chance to hear about social action from other parts of the world.

In the group tackling COVID-19, Aowlad Hossain, from Bangladesh, shared his project to raise awareness of the pandemic and provide food and social security support to his community. Meanwhile, Mahmoud Abdelfattah, from Egypt, shared his project to equip doctors experiencing a shortage of medical supplies.

Lizzie Klotz, a choreographer, dancer and facilitator from the UK, shared how she is using creativity to support mothers during lockdown. Through the project, which Lizzie started with three fellow Active Citizens, mothers can participate in shared arts and crafts activities online, with their work being used to create an online 'tapestry'.

In the groups tackling climate change, Hellen Nakasijja, from Uganda, talked about the #GhettoGoGreen initiative in Kampala, which is supporting young people to start urban gardens and giving life to poor areas of the city by creating green spaces to promote healthy lifestyles and recycling.

Nancy Chebet shared the project her community is doing to conserve the environment in Gambela, Ethiopia. As well as clearing litter from the town and unblocking the local river, they are turning recyclable materials into saleable products to sustain the initiative.

In the UK, Maria Strong is supporting the Climate Museum UK initiative, through which she aims to give people in Lewisham – the first local authority to commit to becoming carbon neutral by 2030 – a space to creatively explore climate issues and to connect with communities globally.

●●●  
**'This is the strongest connection I've felt during a workshop – even though it was virtual.'**  
(Participant from Vietnam)

●●●  
**'It's inspired me to cascade the event to other youth in my community, and to develop their virtual skills.'**  
(Participant from Ethiopia)

●●●  
**'For the past year, I have been feeling hyper local, due to the ongoing lockdowns in the UK, so this was a great opportunity to feel like I am connected to something bigger, globally.'**  
(Participant from the UK)





# The power of cross-cultural collaboration

The online communication tools and platforms that have come to define the past year are presenting new opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration, enabling **Active Citizens to enhance their social action with new perspectives and approaches**, whilst building trust across physical borders.

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**‘Partnering with 1001 Ideas Para Mi País in Venezuela is giving us the unique chance to connect with new cultures, share knowledge, develop international talent, bridge our Latin American network and push the creative boundaries of Active Citizens.’**  
Dan Tsu, Director, Lyrix Organix, UK

## UK and Venezuela

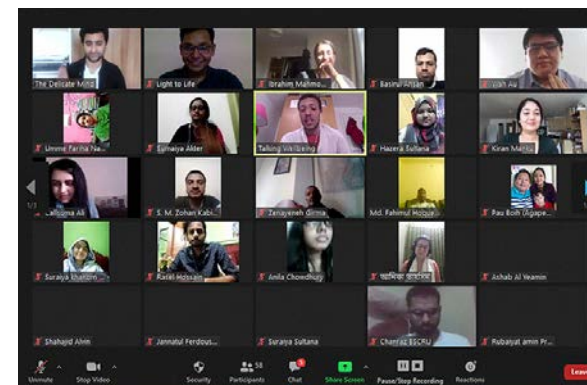
A new project targeting Caracas and other cities in Venezuela is using hip hop as a tool for change, by giving young people the chance to explore language and music, and to gain new technical and creative entrepreneurship skills.

The project is the result of a partnership, fostered by Active Citizens, between 1001 Ideas Para Mi País in Venezuela and Lyrix Organix in the UK – two organisations who see the power of lyricism in giving young people a voice.

Delivered virtually, the aim is to tackle social issues such as crime, violence and reduced access to education, exacerbated by COVID-19, by nurturing the talents of underprivileged young people, and to create opportunities for them to engage with their community through music and music production.

As well as developing technical skills, the project will take the young people through the Active Citizens learning journey, to support them to think about societal issues and to develop their critical thinking, citizenship and understanding of identity.

The organisations connected over their shared experience of working with people from vulnerable communities, and the collaboration will facilitate the bilateral sharing of knowledge and expertise between the UK and Venezuela, while giving both organisations the opportunity to explore new approaches to online facilitation.



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## UK and Bangladesh

In November 2019, during the Active Citizens ten-year celebration in London, two organisations from Bangladesh and the UK built a connection over their shared passion for supporting people’s mental health. This meeting soon led to a cross-cultural collaboration, as both organisations looked for ways to address issues in their communities caused by COVID-19.

Since early 2020, Light to Life, in Bangladesh, and The Delicate Mind C.I.C, in the UK, have been connecting globally through a series of online workshops on different themes, drawing on their shared experiences of supporting mental health in each community. Taking place via Zoom, the sessions provide a safe space for participants from across the world to learn together and share intercultural dialogue.

The workshops have seen the participants discuss themes such as faith and mental health, the role of neuroscience in developing identity, and ways to design social action to tackle the COVID-19 crisis.

The two groups got the chance to share their collaboration with Active Citizens from across the globe at the Virtual International Study Visit event, in February 2021, and heard stories about mental health and well-being from Active Citizens from other parts of the world.

In the lead-up to the 26th UN Climate Change Conference, Light to Life is now adding an environmental focus to its work via a project called Creating the Environmental Education Leaders of Bangladesh, which will promote tree-planting on farms and in public areas and river basins.

**‘The opportunity to connect hip hop culture and communities in the UK and Venezuela, through the lens of Active Citizens, is something truly special. Both partners champion the art of lyricism for social action with young artists in their own communities, and we’re remixing the Active Citizens model with a blended learning approach to creativity and career skills.’**

Dan Tsu, Director, Lyrix Organix, UK

**‘A culturally competent understanding of how others experience mental health helped me foster a deeper understanding of the problems and solutions that can be globally achieved to tackle mental health. So, by working together we can be proactive instead of reactive.’**

Nikhwat Marawat, co-founder, The Delicate Mind C.I.C, UK

# Active Citizens VS climate change

**For young people globally, climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing our world today.** To help them in their fight, Active Citizens is supporting young activists across the globe to implement projects that can create a greener, more sustainable world.

## **Taking the lead on climate change**

Active Citizens is supporting a number of social action projects focusing on tackling climate change, which will take place in the run up to the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference, #COP26, in November 2021. These projects will see young Active Citizens collaborating on climate change solutions, engaging in advocacy and building networks, focusing on two of the COP26 priority areas:

- **adaptation and resilience** – helping people, economies and the environment adapt and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

- **nature** – safeguarding ecosystems, protecting natural habitats and keeping carbon out of the atmosphere.

## **Platforms for global action**

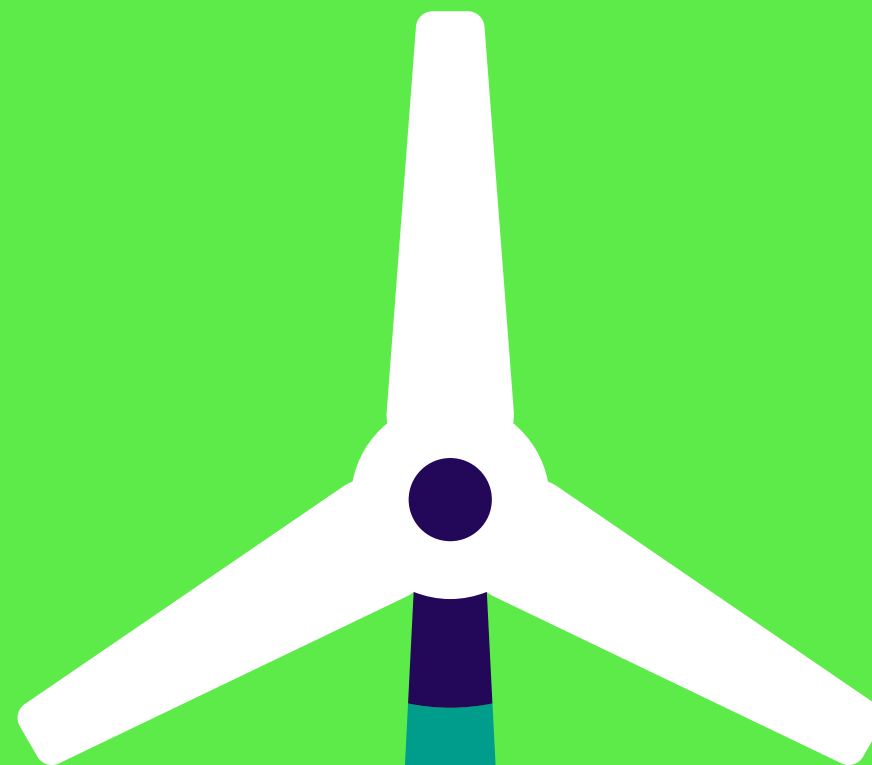
At a Virtual International Study Visit in February 2021, Active Citizens working on climate change projects across the world got the chance to discuss ways they can connect via social action.

At an online workshop in March 2021, partners, facilitators and Active Citizens came together to explore ways of amplifying the impact of Climate action across the Active Citizens network and how climate action approaches can be integrated into the Active Citizens toolkit.

This was an opportunity for UK partners to share their learning on climate justice and environmental activism, and they will continue this collaboration going forward.

## **22 COUNTRIES OVER 100 PROJECTS AND GROWING**

Over the next few pages, you can read about some of the social action projects being delivered by Active Citizens around the world to tackle climate change.





# Building sustainable communities

In **Bangladesh**, Active Citizens are supporting communities to start rooftop gardens, raising awareness on reducing plastic usage, and showing how, by making small lifestyle changes, people can positively impact the environment. The initiatives will provide economic, nutritional and environmental support, while making communities more sustainable.

Active Citizens are creating green zones in communities across **Tunisia**, catering for children, young people and other community members.

Through these spaces, they can promote sustainable practices and create eco-friendly spaces by installing vegetable gardens, recycled planters, plastic collection points, beehives and bird feeders.

In **Egypt**, Active Citizens are promoting green economy practices in local communities to offer people more sustainable ways of addressing environmental challenges, such as limiting the burning of non-degradable materials and promoting rooftop gardening as a low-cost source of food and income.

Active Citizens in Baluchistan, **Pakistan**, are supporting women and low-income families to reduce pollution and gain economic empowerment by creating environmentally-conscious social enterprises that see used tyres being repurposed into saleable products, instead of being burned.



**‘With Active Citizens, we can connect climate change with other key themes, such as gender equality and social entrepreneurship, and design social action to address these challenges together.’**

Joanne Kotelawala, Active Citizens facilitator, Sri Lanka

## Creating greener schools

In **Indonesia**, Active Citizens are giving pre-school teachers the skills to create play-based learning materials from natural resources and recycled waste, creating positive spaces for young children to learn, whilst building their sense of caring for nature. Another project is using offline and online education to help students and teachers understand the impact of climate change and reduce their environmental impact.

In **Afghanistan**, Active Citizens are supporting six teachers and 180 students to create environment protection clubs in three schools in Herat. These clubs will embed eco-conscious activities across the schools, including art competitions, cleaning events, tree planting campaigns and fundraising initiatives.

Active Citizens are enabling young student leaders in three villages in **Ukraine** to increase recycling in their schools and local communities, by teaching them how to design and conduct awareness-raising campaigns and gain community support. The students are also starting small eco businesses to become role models for conscious entrepreneurship.





A woman in a red sari is standing on a wooden ladder, working on a solar panel mounted on a metal pole. The background shows a lush, green mountainous landscape under a cloudy sky. The woman is smiling and looking towards the camera.

# Empowering young climate activists

**‘Being part of Active Citizens means being part of a worldwide community. I feel empowered and know that together we can activate people globally.’**

Soulla Karra, an Active Citizens facilitator and civil engineer from Cyprus, one of six European Union countries Active Citizens is supporting to tackle climate change, alongside Bulgaria, Ireland, Poland, Croatia and Greece.

In Birzeit University, **Occupied Palestinian Territories**, Active Citizens have established an environmental parliament, where they are empowering fellow students to become environmental advocates by tackling climate change in their communities and engaging with leaders on environmental issues.

In **Lebanon**, Active Citizens are delivering sessions to educate young people on the impact of climate change and providing online spaces for young people to connect with each other to plan and deliver social action projects that tackle climate change in their communities.





**‘Active Citizens have always taken the lead on addressing global challenges, and as we see more Active Citizens around the world taking action against climate change, we are proud to be supporting them.’**

Monomita Nag-Chowdhury, Active Citizens Global Programme Manager, British Council

In Khairpur, **Pakistan**, Active Citizens are embarking on a mission to plant 5,000 trees in local communities, with the support of 1,300 households. After gaining support through a door-to-door awareness campaign, the Active Citizens will cultivate the trees in a nursery, before distributing them for planting.

After learning about the vital role that bees play in tree and plant pollination, a group of Active Citizens in Allyene, northern **Morocco**, are introducing bee hives to restore the ecological balance of the area.

Active Citizens are supporting Xuan Son National Park, in **Vietnam**, to promote sustainable tourism by developing educational resources and training sessions for officials and local people to understand their role in protecting the natural environment.

Active Citizens from the Tekoá Kwaray indigenous community in the state of São Paulo, **Brazil**, are working to protect their lands from the harmful effects of mining practices. They will share knowledge, technologies and techniques for agro-ecological planting, beekeeping, composting and seedling formation, which will not only protect the local environment, but offer self-sufficiency and new income for the community.



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# Raising awareness about environmental issues

In **Sri Lanka**, Active Citizens are supporting communities to protect the coastline for future generations. As well as conducting a project to install new waste management solutions in coastal locations, they are working with environmental experts to create an interactive animation on the importance of coastal conservation for school children.

Active Citizens in **Indonesia** are raising community awareness on the importance of local mangrove forests in Ambon Bay, which are being destroyed by waste carried by the current. By educating people on effective waste management, they are helping communities take an active role to protect the delicate mangrove eco-system and ensure the sustainability of mangrove forests in the area.

Active Citizens in São Paulo, **Brazil**, are producing a documentary series about the impact of rising sea levels on local fishing communities. Through this, they hope to raise awareness of the issue, educate people on why it is happening and explore solutions implemented by other countries to solve the same issue. The series will draw on testimonials from young people aged 18 to 35 and will be shared online to increase its reach.

In **Ukraine**, Active Citizens noticed a lack of effective climate change resources for people with disabilities, so they've set out to develop more inclusive and accessible information sources, while educating people on how to tackle environmental issues.



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# Protecting the environment

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Thank you to all those who have contributed to this publication.

Since 2009, Active Citizens has worked in partnership with and been funded by a range of organisations.