

Empowering Sri Lankan Youth Through Shared Values

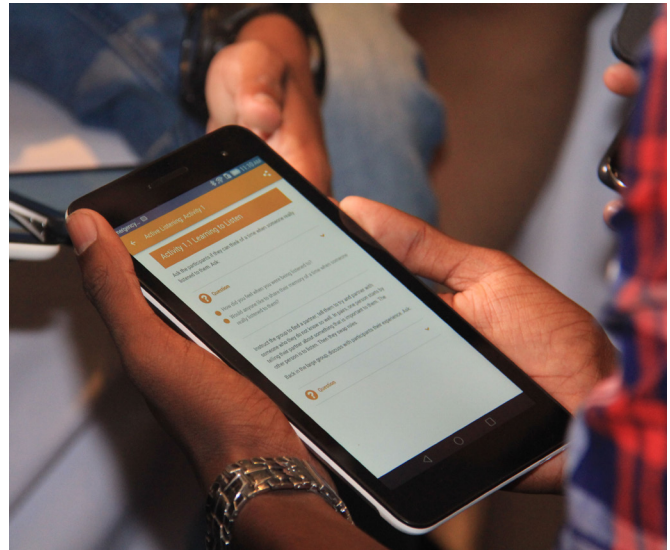
With support from an education specialist and in close consultation with religious leaders and community leaders, The Asia Foundation has developed a shared values education curriculum. Covering seven core humanistic values—active listening, peace, respect, tolerance, compassion, honesty and sincerity, and working together—the curriculum promotes a range of interactive and thought-provoking activities to help understand each value, their impact on relationships and ones' own personal development.



The Foundation believes that if young people understand, appreciate and absorb common humanistic values that underpin every society, they will then be more likely to support a plural and tolerant approach to resolving communal issues that arise within their own communities. The Values Curriculum is designed to be easily accessible by youth across Sri Lanka.

VALUES CURRICULUM

The curriculum is available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English and includes modules designed to be used by anyone with an interest in encouraging commitment to positive values, especially by groups of young people across youth clubs. It also remains flexible enough that it can be used in other contexts, such as schools, universities as well as professional workspaces, with the material being adapted to reflect examples from the participants' local area or made appropriate for different age groups. The Asia Foundation is promoting the curriculum under a three-year project, Promoting Shared Values, Shared Spaces, and Building Local Capacities for Dispute Resolution in Sri Lanka, implemented in six districts: Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee, Ampara, Kurunegala, and Kalutara.



The values curriculum rollouts and training of trainers (ToTs) reflect current trends in perceptions of youth in project locations captured by research and surveys conducted under the project. Most youth (88%) in project districts believe that peace education is lacking and should be made part of the existing school curriculum. The research also shows a high number of youth who claim to face discrimination on the basis of ethno-religious identities within their own area (72%) and within the country in general (44%).

DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM

Keeping up with current trends in the growing digital and IT domains and backed by research which indicates that more than half of young people in project locations are online at least once a month and 32% use their online activity for educational purposes, the Foundation updated and digitized the values curriculum into an android-based mobile application called Values4All. The curriculum is also available on its website www.values4all.lk and via e-thaksalava (the online library of the Ministry of Education). By digitizing the curriculum, the Foundation aims to provide greater access for young people in a context where technology and social media presents both

an opportunity and a challenge to promote social cohesion.

The Values4all project is also extensively promoted on social media; where engaging content collected from the ToTs and directly from participants have been shared on Facebook and Twitter. Video tutorials from the ToTs were also created in Sinhala and Tamil languages, including sign-language, and made accessible on the Values4all Youtube channel.

The digitization of the curriculum has enabled a systematic roll-out of these values and has helped expand reach outside project locations. As such, the program specifically focuses on youth leaders and activists who would be able to share the curriculum with a much wider audience through their own networks.

TRAINING YOUTH LEADERS AS VALUES4ALL FACILITATORS

The Foundation partnered with the National Youth Services Council (NYSC) and Sri Lanka Unites to conduct a series of ToTs in each project location. The overarching goal was to help the facilitators better understand and respond to ethnic and/or religious incidents in a non-violent manner. Through an initial three-day ToT conducted with youth leaders from each district, a core group of 88 male and female Values4All facilitators was formed for the purpose of supporting a series of curriculum rollouts to be conducted across project locations. The training experience gained by these youth facilitators will help them improve their relations among peers as well as other segments in society (elders, clergy, authorities etc.) and provide them a platform to strengthen dialogue across communities.

ROLLOUT OF VALUES4ALL WITH YOUTH

The Foundation continued working with the National Youth Services Council and partnered with Sarvodaya to rollout the values curriculum with youth across the six project districts. A mentorship approach has been adopted throughout the training and rollout process in order to provide necessary support and guidance to the youth facilitators in developing interpersonal skills, sharing their experiences and understanding how to respond to ethnic and/or religious incidents in a non-

violent manner.

In 2019, the Foundation supported two phases of rollouts for over 900 youth from NYSC, Sarvodaya and other youth organizations. The rollouts enabled the youth facilitators to further develop their facilitation and leadership skills and was an opportunity for some facilitators to overcome linguistic barriers in certain bilingual districts. Overall, the project aims to train a minimum of 1800 young people who are active within their communities. The Foundation has mainstreamed gender as a cross-cutting issue to ensure interventions promote equal participation, representation, and access to project resources.

A reconciliation event was organized in Colombo for the core group of trained facilitators from all six project districts. The event provided a platform for the youth to innovatively engage with each other through arts and culture. Facilitators explored music, language, and history over this two-day event. Shared culture was explored throughout the event, and the inter-district interaction was greatly enjoyed by the participants. The event concluded with an invitation to the youth to host similar events within their own districts by focusing on a notion of shared culture, to encourage youth-led initiatives within the project.

WIDENING THE SCOPE OF VALUES4ALL

Based on increasing interest from higher education institutions and universities, the project has also organized a pilot training of trainers for lecturers at the National School of Business Management (NSBM). The two-day training allowed the lecturers to understand the benefit of including the study of values in business studies. NSBM will be using the values curriculum to complement the mandatory personal development module for their MBA programs. Similar requests from the Mediation Boards Commission (MBC) materialized in a three-day training for program assistants in charge of establishing peer mediation cells in schools. The training was a good opportunity to institutionalize the curriculum as part of the regular MBC training.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.



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7/20