



Social Innovation in South East Asia programme

Case studies series: Active Citizens in universities and communities

April 2021

www.britishcouncil.org/society/social-enterprise

Sharing values and visions for social change

From universities to communities: how a globally connected network, led by the UK, has made a difference locally in South East Asia.

The students at the University of Padjadjaran in Indonesia's third largest city of Bandung are encouraged to drive positive impact in local communities: as many as 6,000 first-year students are now required by the university to take part in a module based on the British Council's Active Citizens programme each year, to come up with social action plans in order to make a difference in their own communities.

Active Citizens is a social leadership training programme, designed to give people around the world the skills and capacity to solve, in their own way, the problems that their communities face. The scheme is built around a global network, and rests on a method of active learning developed to create meaningful activity and social action within communities.

The British Council works with partners – trusted organisations with a strong presence in the community, such as grassroots civil society groups and universities – which are responsible for delivering the programme locally. In turn, these partners nominate facilitators – trainers – who are instructed by the British Council

through workshops. Facilitators then cascade their knowledge to local participants, the Active Citizens, who are guided to develop their skills and ideas in order to put them into practice and make a difference in their communities.

The programme follows a core learning journey which is adaptable to different contexts and needs. First it focuses on individual self-awareness and identity, then it moves on to understanding others and building relationships and trust. The training then explores the collective, with an emphasis on understanding communities, their issues and potential solutions.

Through this process, Active Citizens improves participants' social responsibility and leadership skills, enabling them to fulfil the final stage of the journey – planning and delivering a social action project in their communities.

When Mohamad Fahmi became Director of Education and Internationalisation at Padjadjaran University in 2020, he convinced the university to adopt the Active Citizens programme for all first year students, and the British Council trained 60 lecturers to become Active Citizen facilitators.

The first cohort completed the programme between September and December 2020. This coincided with Covid-19 pandemic restrictions which meant that the

THE LEARNING JOURNEY OF AN ACTIVE CITIZEN

Active Citizens is structured around a learning journey, referred to as 'the river', which starts by building self-awareness and confidence, and culminates in the planning and delivery of social action.

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 TOGETHER

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 the social action using improved social responsibility and leadership skills.



Indonesian teacher and writer Dicky Senda runs activities with young people from his hometown, Mollo, in the mountains of Timor. Photographer Armin Septiexan

programme leaders had to quickly shift from the planned face-to-face delivery to online.

The pivot was successful and the students' resulting projects included setting up anti-hoax social media accounts designed to fight misinformation among local groups; collecting second-hand books for fostered or disadvantaged children in nearby villages; and going to town markets to teach people anti-Covid-19 measures such as mask-wearing.

'The learning journey is about looking at identity and thinking about cultural differences. This enables Active Citizens to build empathy and increase intercultural dialogue skills. They open up, listen to others and work towards a common goal together on an issue,' says Active Citizens Global Programme Manager Monomita Nag-Chowdhury.

Identity is power

The Active Citizens programme helped Indonesian teacher and writer Dicky Senda to develop a project that was dear to him.

When he came back to his hometown Mollo in the mountains of Timor after several years living in Java (which is 380km away from Jakarta), he realised the cultural wealth of indigenous communities was not appreciated nor capitalised upon. The members of the younger generation were disconnected from their local traditions and indigenous knowledge was being lost forever, as it was normally passed on orally. He realised that this knowledge could solve many of the village's problems, such as poor education and low economic activity.

The Active Citizens programme, which he completed in 2016, enabled him to develop a framework for his project, Lakoat Kujawas (named after local fruit), and to put it into action in the village. As a result, he engaged young

‘When we meet 20 people from 20 different communities, we meet 20 values, visions, perspectives and challenges’

villagers in researching and archiving local traditions and created a social enterprise that sold traditional products. The training showed him that 'to solve the problem we must use our identity and potential as a power', he says.

Learning from other Active Citizens was an important part of his experience, he adds. 'When we meet 20 people from 20 different communities, we meet 20 values, visions, perspectives and challenges,' he says.

In 2017, an Active Citizen from Birmingham in the UK came to visit Senda's community in Timor, to educate teenagers in the village about gender issues. Senda visited the UK a year later and says he 'learned a lot' from meeting other Active Citizens there and hearing more about social entrepreneurship.

'After coming back I felt confident to run my social enterprise,' he says. In 2019 he launched an ecotourism project where visitors can discover his village's indigenous culture and nature.

Since the programme's inception in 2009, hundreds of thousands of Active Citizens have delivered more than 13,000 community-led social action projects in 78 countries worldwide.

Active Citizens from around the world connect with each other through workshops, online resources, social media, networking and international study visits.

International study visits bring together Active Citizens from different countries, giving them the opportunity to see local social action first-hand and gain new ideas which they can then take back to their own communities. In 2020 and 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions, the visits were successfully held online. Three Indonesian participants took part in two international study visit workshops with more than 50 people from 16 countries, including six from the UK. The workshops enabled them to build connections, share learning and explore the response to global challenges that are relevant to all communities around the world – Covid-19 and climate change.

In the future, based on the success of this year's workshops, online networking will continue to be part of the Active Citizens approach alongside face-to-face meetings.

At the University of Padjadjaran, after enthusiastic feedback from the students, the programme is set to be repeated next year. The Covid-19 pandemic created challenges, says the university's Mohamad Fahmi, but the students still delivered impactful projects, working together digitally.

'The impact of Covid-19 has resulted in many challenges,' Nag-Chowdhury says. 'It is important to show that we are still connected – connected by action.'

This article was written by Laura Joffre at [Pioneers Post](#) for the British Council.

‘The impact of Covid-19 has resulted in many challenges. It is important to show that we are still connected – connected by action’