

EVALUATION SUMMARY

External evaluation of the project ‘Promoting positive voices in diaspora communities’

EVALUATION THEME

1. Governance
2. Citizen–state relations

INTRODUCTION

The ‘Promoting positive voices in diaspora communities’ project was undertaken from June 2011–14 and was a partnership between Alert and two development education centres (DECs): Lancashire Global Education Centre and Global Education Derby, as well as Y Care International and YMCA Hayes. The project activities were targeted at young people from diaspora communities in three localities in England: London, Derby and Brierfield. The project also produced a report, [Voices across borders](#), which aimed to deepen understanding of diaspora communities in the UK and improve partnerships between diasporas and policy-makers on peacebuilding and development policy and practice. The main diaspora communities who were involved in the project overall were Pakistani, Sri Lankan Tamil, Congolese and Somali, however other young people from a range of African and Hispanic diasporas also took part in the activities.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The main aims of the project was to:

- Raise awareness within UK-based diaspora communities of the structural causes of poverty and conflict in their countries of heritage, together with developing public support for peacebuilding and development initiatives in those regions.
- Develop best practice and understanding regarding how to best engage diaspora communities in peacebuilding and development issues and processes in their countries of heritage.

The main outputs from the project were:

- 335 young people took part in the programme across the three hubs over three years, with 201 people completing at least 12 sessions using the concept of ‘connect, challenge, change’ (CCC), which is a non-formal education/global youth work methodology.
- Over 200 CCC sessions were held with young people over three years.
- 15 residential weekend workshops on deepening young peoples’ understanding of conflict issues were undertaken.
- 15 local community events held reaching 1,211 people.

- A toolkit was produced to support youth practitioners working with young people from diaspora communities interested in issues of conflict and development.
- A youth-led research project undertaken by 22 young people was produced called, [Voice of youth](#).
- A visit to Pakistan by a delegation of young people resulted in coverage by the BBC Punjabi service, BBC Asian Network, GEO TV in Pakistan and the Daily Jang a newspaper for Pakistani diaspora based in the UK. The young people gave a series of interviews and took part in exchanges with students and government organisations and officials.
- Two key forums were held, attended by policy-makers, civil society and diaspora organisations in the UK with Syrian diaspora and in Brussels on the issues of securitisation and engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on data covering the period from November 2011 up until May 2014.

Evaluation methods included:

- Review of project documentation and monitoring data to measure achievement of project outputs assessed against the project log frame.
- Profiling youth participants.
- Developing, collating and analysing baseline and follow-up outcomes material from youth group participants.
- Focus groups with a sample of youth people from each of the youth hubs.
- Focus groups with a sample of diaspora community members from each of the youth hubs.
- Face-to-face interviews with delivery staff from all the participating DECs.
- Telephone-based interviews with project management staff and advisory panel members.

The evaluation was carried out by two evaluators over 22 days.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Diaspora youth:

- The project has increased young people's levels of knowledge and understanding around issues of conflict and development, and the distance travelled by all the young people has been significant.
- There has been a higher than expected level of development of advocacy skills in a cohort of dedicated young people.
- Increased levels of confidence have been a key outcome. This has added value in developing transferable skills and raising the aspirations of the young people.
- Peer-to-peer learning through a shared global experience has allowed the young people to recognise commonalities and value difference, enabling them to respond to issues they face in navigating multiple identities.
- The project has increased the young people's understanding and ability to respond to issues of conflict within their local community.

DEC sector:

- The knowledge, expertise and positive attitude of the engagement staff has been a key contributing factor to the success of the project.

- A challenge was identified in the DECs navigating conflicting agendas – youth-led principles vs. goal-driven project objectives.
- There is a need for practitioners to be aware of the context they are working within and conflict-sensitivity when engaging diaspora communities.
- Young people recognise multiple entry points for effecting change and advocacy, through greater understanding of local decision-making and the process of the political system.
- The project has been successful in developing DECs' capacity to engage diaspora youth in global learning, but wider dissemination has been limited.

Community engagement:

- Community events have promoted community cohesion on a local, national and global level.
- The community event structure acted as an effective teaching ground to equip young people with advocacy and key transferable life skills, but it has been hard to assess whether it met the intended awareness-raising outcomes.
- The project had mixed success in marketing and publicising community events.
- The project has identified a clear appetite for dialogue around issues affecting diaspora communities and to replicate and expand the work with adult populations.

LESSONS

The key lessons for Alert and its partners are:

- The methodology of CCC is effective in engaging young people from different backgrounds.
- Young peoples' motivation needs to be maintained by regular sessions and engagement, and we delivered far more sessions in the local areas than envisaged to meet this need.
- The CCC sessions themselves worked best when young people decide the issue they wanted to cover and discuss, and facilitators (i.e. partners) have to be flexible and adaptable.
- The provision of community events enable young people to have an outcome from the discussions, so that they can take action.
- For young people who were newly arrived into the UK (in west London) from conflict-affected countries, the project helped them to build relationships, friendships and to help them understand how conflict happens and the structural causes.
- Young people from diaspora communities have the potential to be powerful advocates with policy-makers and at a policy level, and there is a need for the partners, NGOs and institutions to explore how this can be built into advocacy strategies.
- There is a need to engage with politicians more as policy-makers and to do this on a one-to-one basis from an early stage to identify project champions who can facilitate wider access to policy-makers.

Please also see [Promoting positive diaspora voices toolkit](#) for further reflections and case studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The final evaluation has shown that the project provided an excellent opportunity to trial the project process in three different localities and has enabled Alert to develop an effective framework for replication in the future. The evaluation study provided the following recommendations:

- There is the capacity to replicate the same model in future projects. However, experience has shown that the hub structure must be flexible to respond to the local context.

- There is clear potential to develop advocacy skills in a cohort of dedicated young people who would be able to advocate with relevant policy-makers on key issues facing diaspora youth across the UK.
- A more meaningful impact would be achieved if young people were enabled to take ownership early on and a fully youth-led approach was adopted.
- If the hub model is replicated, there is potential for further development of the cross-hub activity element and peer-to-peer staff support and exchange/training.
- Community cohesion has been a significant unintended outcome of the project. Project partners should consider whether this should be a recognised objective.
- Consideration should be taken to explore what elements of monitoring and evaluation have been beneficial in capturing institutional learning.
- There is potential to create space for dialogue around issues affecting diaspora communities and to replicate and expand the work with adult populations.
- The input of skills and resources from the project has had a positive impact on DEC's in particular, building the long-term capacity of the school youth service in Brierfield. Consider how future projects might replicate this model to capacity-build local organisations.