Non-Formal Education for Youth-Led Change

Project Report

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Disclaimer: The images used in this report are not taken from the project activities described. This is to ensure the anonymity of research participants.

List of Acronyms

AHRC - Arts and Humanities Research Council
CCD - Centre for Communication and Development
CTS – Changing the Story
FGD – Focus Group Discussion
IDEA - Institute of Development Affairs
LEAD - Leadership for Advancing Development in Bangladesh
NFE – Non-Formal Education
NGO – Non-Government Organization
SAP – Social Action Project
SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
UK – United Kingdom
UN – United Nations
YPSA - Foundation and Young Power in Social Action

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1. Introduction

Non-formal education (NFE) initiatives with young people are understood as having an inherent flexibility which provide spaces for learning that young people often identify as missing in their formal education systems (Rogers 2005; Cooke, Hodgkinson, and Manning 2023). These can be spaces of potential, for example with participatory pedagogies opening spaces for young people to learn about subjects in a more in-depth, nuanced, and experiential way.

There is a wealth of NFE programmes running with young people across the world, facilitated by a range of groups from large International Organisations to local Civil Society Organisations. The aims of these projects vary widely, and many aim to empower young people to engage in key social issues and global development challenges such as gender inequality, climate change, social inequality, peacebuilding, and political engagement (see, for example, Namoog and Agyekum 2024, Coppock et al 2022, Datzberger 2017, Simac, Marcus & Harper 2021). These programmes are often evaluated independently from one another, and there has been a lack of scholarly engagement with such projects (Almeida and Morais 2024). This report is based on findings from 'Non-formal education for youth-led change'; a project that sought to address this gap by examining a body of non-formal education programmes together.

NFE for youth-led change has, so far, comprised a knowledge exchange workshop and feasibility studies in Bangladesh and Ethiopia – alongside which the British Council funded an additional commensurate research project in Myanmar. This report brings together the findings from across these elements of the project. It demonstrates that:

- The inherent flexibility of NFE can create spaces for embodied and experiential learning and a discussion of current issues facing young people and their communities.

- Engaging in this learning can change the way young people understand themselves as individuals and as a collective, their perceptions of their society, and their place in society. This can empower young people to recognise themselves as important actors, who can enact change in their communities.

- The report highlights examples of real change that young people have made in their communities through engaging with these programmes.

- As well as highlighting these successes of NFE programmes, the report also demonstrates where NFE programming needs further attention – including greater input from young people in the design of programmes, ensuring different groups of young people are able to actively participate in programmes, ensuring that programmes are designed to be embedded in the communities with which they work, and enabling sustainable impact.

Ultimately, the report highlights the real potential of NFE programmes with young people to contribute to youth-led change, but highlights setbacks in ensuring the sustainability of their effects for young people and their communities – largely due to a lack of an enabling environment for young people. It calls, therefore, for a pursual of this enabling environment to be embedded into the design and enactment of NFE programmes – and for further research and knowledge exchange to understand how sustainability in programming can be achieved.

'NFE for youth-led change' was developed in partnership by the University of Leeds and the British Council, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through their 'follow-on funding for impact and engagement' grants. These grants are intended to support knowledge exchange and engagement developing from a previous research project and enhance the value of this research beyond academia. The project sought to examine exactly what its title suggests; how NFE programmes that work with young people can be harnessed to enable youth-led change in society.

This project developed from a previous AHRC research project, 'Changing the Story' led by Professor Paul Cooke at the University of Leeds, that examined how the participatory arts can be harnessed to enable youth-centred approaches to civil society building in countries affected by conflict. It comprised 30 projects running in 12 different countries across multiple strands. In one of these strands, Changing the Story partnered with the British Council to identify connections, synergies and possibilities for mutual learning between Changing the Story and the British Council's programming and research with young people, particularly their Next Generation series[1]. Through a knowledge exchange workshop exploring these synergies, it became clear that there was significant appetite for further collaboration around the subject of NFE, to bring together the work of researchers and practitioners and expand the knowledge base around how NFE differs from other forms of learning, and how it can facilitate processes of youth empowerment, engagement, and youth-led social change. This discussion became the seed for 'NFE for youth-led change', which was designed by Dr Katie Hodgkinson (Principal Investigator) and Prof Paul Cooke (co-investigator) at the University of Leeds, and Jane Grantham, Olga Mitrovic, James Perkins and Reece Waldron at the British Council. Members of the knowledge exchange workshop have acted as the steering group for this project.

1   *https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/research-series/next-generation*

The report will proceed as follows:

Section 2
Will address the definitional issue of 'non-formal education' and then unpack understandings of NFE for youth-led action, drawing particularly on the findings from Changing the Story.

Section 3
Will provide a more in-depth overview of the NFE for youth-led change project, unpacking the knowledge exchange workshop, feasibility studies, and Myanmar study.

Section 4
Specifically explains the methodology of the feasibility studies.

Section 5
Presents the findings:

5.1 Unpacks how NFE has been found to promote youth empowerment and youth-led social change, and the implications this has for young people and their perception of themselves and their role in society.

5.2 Provides examples of the changes young people have made in their communities, delivered as part of, or as a result of, engaging in NFE programmes.

5.3 Examines the impact that programmes can have on youth employability; identifying the skills that young people developed through programmes, as well as their challenges in recognising the transferability of these skills.

5.4 Examines how programmes engage with gender, both in terms of the content of programmes, as well as in enabling equitable participation between genders, which was found to be a challenge.

5.5 Highlights the centrality of stakeholder engagement in the success – or otherwise – of NFE programmes, particularly discussing how programmes engage young people, how organisational partnerships positively and negatively affect programmes, and the importance of community embeddedness to the overall success of programmes.

5.6 Addresses issues of the sustainability of programmes' impact for young people and their engagement with their communities.

Section 6
Provides a brief summary of the findings.

Section 7
Provides recommendations for future practice and research in the field of NFE for youth-led change.

2. Understanding non-formal education

Before understanding current literature around the role of NFE for youth-led change, it is worthwhile beginning by unpacking what NFE is. This is most easily done in relation to unpacking the three (broadly understood) forms of education; formal, non-formal, and informal. In general terms, formal education refers to education that takes place in formal institutions such as schools and universities, non-formal education takes place outside of these formal structures but is still planned or structured with particular (learning) outcomes or objectives in mind, and informal education is the unplanned learning that takes place through engaging with community and society; often understood as socialisation (Johnson & Majewska 2022).

Of course, these forms of education overlap; non-formal education might take place within the spaces of formal education institutions, through extra-curricular activities, for example. And informal education necessarily occurs within both formal and non-formal education, where learners interact with their peers, educators/facilitators, and wider society and learn social and cultural norms and values through this process.

The term 'non-formal education' was coined by Philip Coombs, Roy Prosser and Manzoor Ahmed in 1973 as 'an organized educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity, that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives' (1973, p.8). The type of programmes that fall under the remit of NFE can be broad and significantly varied. The scope of the term is contested amongst scholars, but may include, amongst many other things, vocational training, adult education programmes, health awareness programmes, and arts-based programmes. This definition has led some to argue that the term is too broad to have relevance, yet Rogers (2005, pp.248- 249) argues there are two key benefits to using the term NFE. Firstly, NFE highlights that 'there is more to education than programmes with Ministries of education mount', therefore enabling attention to the education sector as a whole, and not only to how the sector is defined by governments and their donors. Secondly, and most importantly, it foregrounds the non-formality and flexibility of NFE programming. This flexibility can allow for quicker responses to changing needs, adaptation to the needs of particular groups, decentralised structures, community engagement and approaches to education, education beyond formal schooling years, and innovation in education (Rogers 2005). NFE can therefore play a central role in extending the remit of education beyond what is often possible within formal education structures (Johnson & Majewska 2022, British Council 2022).

Despite the important role that NFE can play, and a large number of NFE programmes across the globe – particularly those run by NGOs and international organisations as part of their global development programming - there is limited attention on academic enquiry into the field. Research that does exist, tends to focus on examining if and how NFE can counter the exclusion experienced by marginalised groups in society, particularly those who miss out on access to formal schooling (Almeida and Morais 2024) (also understood as 'alternative education'). Whilst this is, of course, a highly important area of study, there persists a wider lack of academic examination into how NFE can contribute to youth empowerment and youth-led change, despite this being the focus of many NFE programmes.

Changing the Story itself ran a series of arts-based projects with young people that can be understood as NFE programmes. Within these programmes, the spaces for flexibility, participation, and innovation were found to have transformative potential, and empower young people to contribute to social change. Hodgkinson (2024), for example, examined CTS projects in Kosovo and Cambodia that engaged young people in researching the histories of their respective countries, through participatory arts activities including participatory filmmaking, animations, music, and zines. Through these projects, young people were able to learn about the lived realities of conflict in their countries. This is something young people reported not learning about through their formal education, which largely (for a range of political and practical reasons) focused on overarching and state-based narratives of conflict. Young people, through the participatory methodologies, began to see themselves as researchers and knowledge producers, which meant they began to see themselves as important actors in deconstructing narratives of the past,

and in developing nuanced understandings of history. Their engagement with the programme through the participatory arts activities enabled experiential learning. Hodgkinson identified that young people developed emotive connections with, and empathetic understandings of, the experiences of different groups living through conflict. This contributed to youth-led peacebuilding, as young people began to break down binaries that existed in their communities between victims and perpetrators, and between generations. They were empowered to embed these peacebuilding processes into their communities, including through the artistic outputs they produced, through dialogue with generations who had experienced conflict, and through educating young generations about what they had learnt.

The important role that NFE can play in promoting peace building amongst young people has been similarly demonstrated in other studies. In post-conflict Sri Lanka, in 2017, for example, formal education was found to continue to promote segregation between Muslim and Tamil communities, and reproduce structural injustices in the country (Duncan and Lopes Cardozo 2017). This resulted in teachers, students, and community members developing NFE initiatives to foster reconciliation between communities. Whilst these initiatives made positive steps towards reconciliatory processes, they 'have difficulties in addressing the structural inequalities and root causes of conflict that are being reproduced and institutionalised through the formal education system' (Duncan and Lopes Cardozo 2017, p.91). In Northern Uganda, Datzberger (2017) examined non-formal community education programmes set up to provide education to pastoral communities who are excluded from formal education systems. The programme was centred around embedding locally and culturally relevant

material into the teaching practice, involving local community in the design and delivery of the programme. This programme was found to have inadvertently contributed to stabilising peace and the security in the area, because of the contributions it made to social justice.

In countries affected by conflict and complex emergencies, understanding the role of education is perhaps particularly pertinent given the potential of education to not only promote peacebuilding, but also to promote conflict. In their seminal text, Kenneth Bush and Dianna Salterelli (2000) highlight the 'two faces of education'; demonstrating that education has both a negative face, that normalises violence and perpetuates social inequalities that make conflict likely to occur in society, as well as a positive face, through which education can work to address these inequalities and promote inclusivity and tolerance, thereby promoting peace and peacebuilding. These mechanisms take place in both formal and non-formal education. They also exist beyond conflict-affected contexts; education can always have two faces – not binary, but sometimes acting simultaneously - that contribute to justice or injustice, inclusion or exclusion; highlighting the importance of understanding the mechanisms at play within educational systems and how the 'positive faces' can be harnessed for youth-led change.

Returning to Changing the Story, the May Group (forthcoming) examine how young people are often limited in what they are able to say in their society, or how they are listened to. Formal education systems, for example, can actively discourage critical engagement with current and past national and international issues; cultural norms can embed hierarchies in which young people are discouraged from challenging social practices, structures, and beliefs; and political systems are often exclusionary of young people. Research on Changing the Story found that through engaging young people in participatory methodologies and experiential learning, participants were able to develop both their individual and collective 'voice' to address issues largely deemed unsayable in their communities in a variety of innovative ways. One international group of young people, for example, developed a zine that unpacked the complex and deeply political issue of dichotomies between victim and perpetrator, or hero and villain, 'sides' in a conflict[2]. By discussing the issue through a fictitious world with fictitious characters, young people were able to 'speak' to, and encourage reflection on, this highly complex and contentious issue. Another group of young people worked collectively to create a pocketbook speaking to widespread un- and under-employment of youth; seeking to develop a collective voice of young people who called on employers to support young people into employment and governments to stop pushing young people towards entrepreneurship without adequate support mechanisms[3].

The May Group articulate the notion of the 'transrational' to both understand how young people participated in the programmes, and how they expressed their voice(s) through the programmes. This notion of transrationality considers not only what is learnt and spoken 'rationally' and 'cognately', but also seeks to understand how embodied experiences, emotions, and interactions impact learning (May Group, forthcoming; Cremin, Echavarría, and Kester 2018). Scholars argue that the transrational continues to be poorly understood in educational fields, despite the

2 https://www.changingthestory.leeds.ac.uk/changing-the-story-young-change-makers/changing-the-story-youth-research-board/youth-research-board-campaigns-for-change/the-planet-of-no-memory-youth-research-board-fanzine/

3 https://www.changingthestory.leeds.ac.uk/changing-the-story-young-change-makers/changing-the-story-youth-research-board/youth-research-board-campaigns-for-change/youre-not-alone-campaign-on-youth-unemployment/

significant impact it can have on how young people engage with programmes, as well as with their communities. The May Group also examine how young people might express themselves 'translationally'; for example, through evoking collectively, through non-verbal communication (including their artistic outputs), and through how they interact with others.

In Changing the Story, the actions that young people took through engaging in the different programmes, and through the creation of their outputs, were understood as 'pockets of action' in which young people collectively expressed their positionality as youth and developed innovative ways of speaking to the issues that were of most importance to them. The May Group demonstrated that these pockets of action themselves contribute to epistemic justice and sometimes peacebuilding. Importantly, these actions can fit within a wider ecology of action, where momentum towards change can spread through the networks that young people engage with.

This idea of 'ecologies of action' proved central to the Changing the Story project. It highlights that programmes are always embedded within wider social structures that can either be enabling or constraining. These ecologies can, for example, affect epistemic questions of whose and what knowledge counts in a society, what role young people (and all groups) are and are not expected to play, and what role NFE programmes can and should play. Because programmes are always embedded within these systems, they also need to be 'embedded within wider societal support structures in order to ensure that the learning from an individual project is built into a sustainable ecology of action that can outlive the initial funding period and can spread good practice...'. (May Group forthcoming, p.13). These support systems need to be seeking to affect change that, in the instance of this work,

enable young people themselves to be a part of these ecologies of actions.

NFE therefore has a significant role to play in enabling youth-led change; sometimes filling gaps in formal education systems to create spaces for this change. However, there are elements of NFE that continue to go unharnessed, and there is, on the whole, a significant lack of scholarly research examining the potential and the challenges in NFE programming with and for young people.

3. 'Non-formal education for youth-led change'

Within this context, 'Non-Formal Education for Youth-Led Change' aimed to explore and enhance the role of NFE in fostering youth empowerment, social justice, and youth-led change in regions affected by conflict or socio-political challenges. A collaboration between the University of Leeds and the British Council, 'NFE for youth-led change' seeks to understand how NFE can empower young people to become changemakers in their communities, as well as identifying challenges that persist here.

The core aims of the project were: to create an evidence base around the role of NFE in enabling youth-led change; to shape the development of current and future NFE programmes within and beyond the British Council; to facilitate knowledge exchange around the potential for NFE to contribute to youth-led social change; to foster an understanding amongst policymakers of the importance of diverse pedagogical methodologies for youth empowerment, social change, and peacebuilding; and, through shaping and impacting current and future programmes and policies, in the long-term, to contribute to creating effective spaces for the expression of youth voice and youth-led social change.

NFE for Youth-Led Change has worked with the British Council's 'Youth Connect', a global youth leadership programme which supports young people to develop the skills, inspiration and connections to tackle global challenges.

NFE for youth-led change is comprised of a knowledge exchange workshop, with British Council Youth Connect colleagues, partner organisations, and CTS researchers; two feasibility studies of Youth Connect projects in Ethiopia and Bangladesh; and a further research project in Myanmar, commissioned by the British Council to complement this research. By bringing together experiences from a range of NFE programmes in this way, the project has identified key trends and recurring successes and challenges of NFE programmes, contributing to a body of evidence in the field and highlighting where the discussion needs to move next to enable the genuine and sustained empowerment of young people. The project will host further knowledge exchange events and workshops following this report's publication, striving to continue to move the discussion forward. In this section, we will unpack the different elements of this programme, from which the findings in this report have derived.

Youth Connect

Youth connect has been designed to equip young people with the skills and connections they need to address the multiple 21st century challenges that young people face globally- from climate change, conflict and alienation, erosion of trust, to lack of opportunities. Working with and through local civil society organisations, universities, non-governmental and youth-led organisations, the programme works in over 30 countries globally and has supported over 2.5 million young people to develop skills, confidence, resilience and a sense of hope and apply them to address local and global challenges in NFE priority areas.

While individual project activities and results are tailored to a national context, the methodology consists of 1) skills development, training, mentoring, application and reflection, 2) creating connections – collaborative spaces and networks for young people, their communities and decision makers within the country, internationally and with the UK, and 3) building wider ecosystems to amplify and embed young people's voices in decision making and policy making.

3.1 Outline of the Knowledge Exchange Workshop

The knowledge exchange workshop was held in March 2024. It brought together a group of 44 participants from 17 different countries, including academics, British Council colleagues who are working on NFE programmes, implementing partners from various countries, and youth representatives who have been engaged in NFE projects. Countries of participants included the UK, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Greece, Pakistan, Indonesia, Ukraine, Nigeria, Poland, Columbia, Iraq, Egypt, Poland, Lebanon and Jordan. The objective of the workshop was to explore the transformative potential of NFE in fostering youth-led change and to facilitate an exchange of knowledge and best practices across global contexts.

The workshop featured a series of panel discussions with representatives from Youth Connect and Changing the Story, followed by interactive sessions where participants engaged in mapping the different pedagogical approaches used in NFE programs around the world.

The key themes addressed during the sessions included:

- Methodologies and program design for effective NFE.

- Challenges faced by NFE programs in conflict-affected and resource-limited settings.

- Gender equality in NFE programming.

- Youth participation and accountability in shaping NFE programs.

- Sustainability of NFE programs and ensuring long-term impacts.

Each session allowed for the sharing of experiences from diverse contexts. As well as providing some key findings for the project – which are included in this report – the knowledge exchange workshop also shaped the design of the feasibility studies.

3.2.2 Outline of the Feasibility Studies
The feasibility studies conducted in-depth research into the British Council's Youth Connect

programmes in Bangladesh and Ethiopia. The studies sought to understand if and how these programmes were contributing to youth-led change, and, in particular, what about NFE programmes might enable this dynamic. In both contexts, the individual programmes studied represent just one amongst a range of formal and non-formal education programmes in the British Council's portfolio.

3.2.1 Bangladesh

Bangladesh, with a population exceeding 160 million, has approximately 63.7% youth under the age of 35 (UNDP, 2024). Over recent decades, Bangladesh has achieved notable socio-economic progress, transitioning from a primarily agrarian economy to one of the fastest-growing economies in Asia, driven by sectors such as ready-made garments, remittances, and a growing services industry. Despite this growth, youth unemployment remains high, at around 15.7% as of 2023, above the world average of 13.8% (International Labour Organization, 2024). This issue is further compounded by an entrenched and controversial quota system in government jobs, which allocates a significant portion of civil service positions to specific groups, often leading to frustration and a perceived lack of fairness among the country's educated youth.

Following the national elections in January 2024, increasing frustration over youth unemployment and perceived inequities in the job market led to peaceful anti-

government protests in early July 2024. These demonstrations quickly spread across the country, fuelled by demands for fair employment practices and more inclusive governance. However, the government's response was marked by severe crackdowns, leading to widespread violence that reportedly resulted in over 300 fatalities (one month after the protests began, thousands of injuries and, ultimately, the resignation of the Prime Minister in late 2024 (BBC, 2024a; BBC, 2024b). The feasibility study took place 2 months before these protests and the crackdown began.

Alongside these socio-political challenges, Bangladesh faces critical environmental threats exacerbated by climate change. As a low-lying, densely populated delta nation, Bangladesh is acutely vulnerable to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, and river erosion, which annually displace thousands and disproportionately impact marginalized communities. These climate-induced challenges place immense pressure on Bangladesh's economy, infrastructure, and social systems, highlighting the need for sustainable development measures to support its growing and resilient population (Mojid, 2020).

This year in Bangladesh, the British Council project Building Agency of Youth in Climate Action had an aim to connect and build a network of young climate activists across the country. Additionally, a Next Generation Research was carried out to map out in depth youth needs4. The feasibility study, however, focused on the 'Leadership for Advancing Development Bangladesh' (LEAD) initiative. The British Council launched LEAD on October 1, 2020. This initiative, inspired by the British Council's Active Citizens programme, aims to empower young people in Bangladesh to become leaders in their communities, identifying innovative and sustainable

solutions to local and global challenges, linked to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly in the areas of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The project worked with Bangladeshi youth (ages 18-25) across Dhaka, Chattogram, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna and Chuadanga, engaging a total of 3,000 young people. All young people who took part in the programme were university students or recent graduates.

LEAD Bangladesh comprised several activities, including a five-day training program followed by youth-led social action projects (SAPs) and engagement with the diaspora community. Young participants were first engaged in training. Initially planned for face-to-face delivery, this was moved online during the Covid-19 pandemic, although participants were later offered a face-to-face programme to complement their online learning. The program curriculum was designed to empower young people by equipping them with essential skills related to leadership, civic engagement, and sustainable development, particularly in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key training topics included active citizenship, leadership and advocacy, communication skills, project management, ethical considerations, gender equity, safeguarding, social issues, social mapping techniques, as well as community engagement and networking. Participants were also trained in one of SDGs 8, 13, or 16, depending on the needs of their community. The program included workshops focused on civic responsibility and community engagement where participants discussed national history, citizenship, and their roles as active citizens. A variety of skill-building activities, such as communication skills development, public speaking, and interpersonal skills workshops

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were embedded in the training, with activities including discussions, debates, and presentations, as well as participatory activities including mapping activities, and power walks.

After the five-day training, youth engaged in the Social Action Projects (SAPs), in which they designed and then implemented projects in local communities, allowing these young people to translate the theoretical knowledge gained through the training into practical actions that benefited their communities. For example, some participants initiated projects that promoted sustainable agricultural practices, while others focused on civic engagement and women's empowerment (examples of these programmes are included in section 5.2 below). To implement these projects, young people worked with community members, leaders, and local governments or policymakers as needed.

Additionally, there were opportunities to interact with the Bangladeshi diaspora community through online coaching sessions. Over nine online group coaching sessions, Bangladeshi Diaspora members connected with Young Leaders. Each Young Leader had 30 minutes to discuss a specific issue, aiming to empower them to find their own solutions for implementing their SAPs. In total, 243 young people participated in these sessions. Additionally, 30 young people from Bangladesh attended Joint Visioning Workshops in London for a 3-day leadership program. The aim was to enhance the Young Leaders' skills and empower them to identify solutions to local and global challenges. Participants learned the concept of "Leading Beyond Authority" through theoretical frameworks, discussions with leaders, and visits to various organizations. The workshops fostered connections between Diaspora Leaders and Young Leaders, allowing them to explore ideas and solutions to their challenges. On the final day, the Young

Leaders presented their Social Action Projects, showcasing their commitment to driving positive change in their communities.

According to the British Council, LEAD Bangladesh has supported 3000 young people, with young participants initiating 240 Social Action Projects (SAPs) in three critical areas of Bangladesh's development linked to SDGs: entrepreneurship, climate change, and civic engagement, benefiting over 80,000 community members.

3.2.2 Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the fastest-growing economies in the Horn of Africa. The country faces significant challenges, including conflict, political instability and ethnic tensions. Ethiopia is currently facing ethno-nationalist and intercommunal conflicts – these conflicts are occurring between the state and communities, as well as between local and regional communities. Since 2018, conflict between the government of Ethiopia and Ethno-nationalist groups has increased, coinciding with political transition at the national government level. The conflicts have resulted in 'grave human rights violations' being committed by the parties involved, including ethnic cleansing, executions, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, sexual violence, abductions and the destruction of property (Bodhi Consulting; Human Rights Watch 2023). The violence in the country has led to significant levels of forced displacement, with 4.2 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR 2024).

Ethiopia has a very large youth population, with about 70% of its population under the age of 30. A recent Young Lives study has identified the impact of conflict in the country on young people, noting the stark levels of

violence witnessed – with 63% of young people studied in Tigray witnessing someone being killed and 29% of young people in Amhara witnessing sexual violence. This is having a significant impact on young people's mental health. High numbers of young people face food insecurity due to 'inflation, rising food prices and income shocks; crop failures due to repeated droughts; and the disruption of markets and distribution of food aid during the conflict', and the country experiences a youth unemployment rate of approximately 17% (Ford & Favara 2023).

The British Council's portfolio in Ethiopia over the years has included empowering civil society through the flagship FCDO-funded Civil Society Support Programme, which worked with 4,855 CSO and community-based organisations on priority themes: gender transformation, young people and citizen state engagement. Additionally, through the EU-funded Enabling University Peace Education (EUPE) project, implemented in Ethiopia and Sudan, the British Council has worked to advance high-quality peace education in conflict-affected regions, building networks of peacebuilders and enhancing the participation of young people, especially women, in local and national peacebuilding efforts.

In Ethiopia, the Youth Connect programme on which this research focussed was 'Strengthening the Ethiopian National Voluntary Youth Service Programme (ENVY-SP)'. In this project, the British Council and

their partner organisations, Initiative Africa (IA) and Redeem the Generation (RTG), worked to improve the existing ENVY-SP programme; an Ethiopian Ministry of Peace national initiative aimed at promoting youth engagement, peacebuilding, and volunteerism through NFE. The primary goal of ENVY-SP is to build the capacities of young people, enabling them to become responsible, empowered community members equipped with the skills and aptitudes necessary for contributing to their country's development. ENVY-SP seeks to foster a sense of national unity and peaceful coexistence, promote national identity and community service, enhance employability skills, and develop self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship and vocational training.

The British Council's 'Strengthening the ENVY-SP' programme aimed to equip young participants with essential skills for personal development and community engagement through modules such as 'soft skills for youth self-improvement', 'citizen competency', and 'nation building', fostering volunteerism and civic responsibility among Ethiopian youth. From November 2022 to March 2023, the programme worked to develop and standardize the program's training modules, develop an easy-to-use database of youth volunteers, and establish a Youth Association. It aimed to enhance the training's effectiveness, productivity, and quality, addressing identified gaps, ensuring the training meets the program's goals, and providing a uniform, high-quality experience for all trainees.

The training programme – which engages young people with undergraduate degrees – has been designed to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective community service. The training consists of three core modules: Nation Building, citizen competency, and soft Skills for Youth Self-Improvement. Topics include citizenship,

democratic principles, human rights, youth engagement in democracy, social norms, tolerance in diverse societies, social inclusion, exclusion, and cohesion, and peacebuilding. In addition, the training incorporates various activities aimed at promoting personal, professional, and civic development among young participants. This includes sessions on developing communication skills, entrepreneurship, cultural exchange and activities related to personal and professional development, including CV writing and public speaking. These trainings were delivered first in morning sessions in a lecture-type format, to the full cohort of young people, and then, in the afternoon, in smaller seminar groups with more participatory activities. Cultural exchange is also built into the programme.

After taking part in the training, and outside the remit of 'Strengthening the ENVYP-SP' young people were 'deployed' by the Ministry of Peace as volunteers for 10 months in different regions and woredas (districts) in Ethiopia – with regional governments listing areas where they need volunteers. During the deployment, participants engaged in volunteering to support the community, including educational initiatives, health and sanitation campaigns, and environmental conservation efforts. The focus of 'Strengthening the ENVY-SP' was on redesigning the training programmes, improving the registration of participants, and creating a Youth Volunteer Association. They therefore did not have control over the full programme of activities, and were not involved in these deployments. The young participants engaged in the programme underwent the whole experience, and so reflected on this whole experience in their interviews.

3.3 Myanmar Study

Myanmar, an ethnically diverse country home to 135 ethnic groups, has faced decades of widespread poverty, ethnic tensions, and political instability (Simpson & Farrelly, 2024). Myanmar's history is marked by long-standing military rule, ethnic conflicts, and periods of civil war. The country was ruled by the military for most of its independence. In 2011, following a transition to semi-democracy, the military retained significant power and conducted campaigns, such as the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims, which resulted in widespread international condemnation (Kim, 2016). In February 2021, the military coup overthrew the democratically elected government, which led the country back into military rule. The coup initiated massive protests and a brutal crackdown, leading to the formation of a shadow government by opposition groups and ethnic armed organisations. This has resulted in ongoing violent resistance, creating a full-scale civil war (Relief Watch, 2022). Since the coup in 2021, the Myanmar military has 'carried out a brutal nationwide crackdown on millions of people opposed to its rule', with mass killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, bombing campaigns, and the burning of villages (Human Rights Watch 2022). The country faces high levels of internal displacement, with over 3.2 million people internally displaced and 18.6 million people – almost a third of the country's population – in need of assistance in 2024 (UNICEF 2024). Young people constitute around 28% of Myanmar's population.

In Myanmar, during this time of crisis for the country, the British Council has been working on establishing a network of community-based NFE providers that apply a rights-based approach to education for vulnerable Myanmar youth (18-35) who are unable to access opportunities in the formal education system. The Myanmar Youth Empowerment Network (MYEN) was created and supported to deliver NFE services across Myanmar, expanding the reach and improving the quality of skills development opportunities for young people. To complement the feasibility studies in Bangladesh and Ethiopia and contribute to the body of research examining NFE in conflict and emergency affected areas, the British Council commissioned a review of NFE in the country.

The study in Myanmar involved a team of 18 researchers conducting research across 14 states and regions of the country. Data was collected through reviews of the literature, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with education providers, stakeholders, and current and former participants of NFE programmes. A total of 142 participants were engaged, with data collection taking place both online and in person. The research also encountered challenges due to political instability and security concerns, which affected the ability to conduct interviews with certain participants and limited the full achievement of target numbers. Despite these challenges, the researchers took measures to ensure participant safety and privacy, employing secure data storage and communication methods.

The study examined the context of NFE in the country, its role in complementing formal education, and the socio-political changes that have impacted the education sector, particularly the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 military coup. In this context, the study specifically examines the role of NFE in conflict-affected areas, where political instability and social upheaval have severely disrupted access to formal education. It explores NFE programs offered by local NGOs,

civil society organisations, and international donors encompassing vocational training, civic education, alternative education, and life skills development.

3.4 This report

This report will bring together findings from the feasibility studies, Myanmar study, and the Knowledge Exchange Workshop – providing an overview of the key themes that have arisen throughout the duration of 'NFE for Youth-Led Change'. By integrating diverse perspectives and experiences, the report aims to highlight the impact of non-formal education initiatives on youth empowerment, social change, and community development. Through a thematic analysis of the data collected, the report will provide an overview of key successes, challenges, and recommendations for enhancing NFE programs. Ultimately, this synthesis of findings will serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to improve the effectiveness of NFE initiatives and foster meaningful engagement among youth.

4. Methodology of the feasibility studies

As highlighted above, the findings in this report are drawn from our knowledge exchange event, feasibility studies, and the commensurate research project in Myanmar. In this section, we will unpack the qualitative methodology for the feasibility studies in Ethiopia and Bangladesh.

As a follow-on-funding project, the lines of enquiry for this research closely followed the findings of Changing the Story, and the previously mentioned workshop between CTS and the British Council. Based on these, the key questions that guided this project were:

1. How can non-formal education contribute to youth-led social change?

    a. How can NFE contribute to empowering young people?

    b. What impact do different methodologies within NFE programmes have on youth-led social change?

    c. What are the main challenges or shortcomings in NFE promoting youth-led social change?

The selection of the specific case studies, Ethiopia and Bangladesh, followed a pilot study of the Youth Connect programme that was completed by the British Council in Summer 2023, which identified feasible programmes to include. Following the pilot, relevant British Council country teams were contacted to express their interest in taking part in Non-Formal Education for Youth-Led Change. Five countries expressed interest in participating in the programme. Ethiopia and Bangladesh were selected as study sites partly for practical reasons - two of the other countries had FCDO travel restrictions that meant it was not viable to conduct the research - but also because they represented countries with similar growing youth populations, each facing unique challenges of political unrest and environmental precarity.

In both contexts, data derived from an analysis of programme documentation, and from qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (in both contexts) and Focus Group Discussions (in Bangladesh – FGDs were not feasible in Ethiopia, as participants were widely dispersed). After the case studies were selected, the research team conducted a desk analysis of country-programme documents, including grant proposals, training materials, and existing evaluations. This documentation analysis, alongside the findings from CTS, helped to construct the interview guides that would be used for the project. Multiple interview guides were created for different groups of participants: young people, the programme team (both the British Council and their partners), programme facilitators, and (in Bangladesh) community members. These interview guides were refined through multiple iterations; firstly, following the knowledge

exchange workshop, then with input from the projects steering group, and finally in-country, before data collection began, with the in-country researchers following initial meetings with the British Council NFE teams and their implementing partners in which we learnt about the projects in more detail. The in-depth interviews, conducted in both Bangladesh and Ethiopia, aimed to capture detailed narratives from individual participants, while the FGDs conducted in Bangladesh fostered dynamic discussions that could unveil collective insights and group dynamics. Given the focus of this research in understanding youth experiences of NFE programming, a qualitative research design was particularly pertinent (Cresswell 2014).

In both contexts, participants of the research comprised young people, the programme team, and programme facilitators. In Bangladesh, community members were also engaged. In Bangladesh, 21 young people (10 males and 11 females), 4 facilitators (3 male, 1 female), and 6 members of the LEAD Bangladesh programme team were engaged through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Young participants were selected from various regions, including Dhaka (n=8), Sylhet (n=10), Chuadanga (n=2), and Chattogram (n=1). FGDs were also held with young people (13 participants) programme staff (6 participants) and community members who had observed young people's SAPs (2 participants). The British Council Bangladesh acted as gatekeepers for the research; inviting participants to join for the data collection activities.

In Ethiopia, 22 young participants (12 female and 10 male) were engaged in semi-structured interviews. 15 of these interviews took place face-to-face in Addis Ababa, and 7 took place over the phone to facilitate broader participation and accessibility. All young people participating in this study had completed the training and community deployment

program under the ENVY-SP. Some participants were also voluntarily co-facilitating training sessions in different universities. Additionally, 5 members of the 'Strengthening the ENVY-SP' programme team were interviewed, as were 3 programme facilitators. Participants in Ethiopia were selected in consultation with the partner organisations involved in the implementation of the Strengthening ENVY-SP, ensuring a diverse representation of experiences and perspectives. Particularly, facilitators from Redeem the Generation played a pivotal role in connecting researchers with young participants.

Data was collected in English and Bangla in Bangladesh and in English and Amharic in Ethiopia, enhancing the richness of the information gathered and ensuring participants could express themselves comfortably. Interviews were conducted in person or over the phone, depending on participants' preference and location, and generally lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Before taking part in the interviews, participants were sent a participant information form and a research privacy notice in Bangla, Amharic and/or English. They were given a hard copy of these forms at the start of the interview, and given the time to (re-)read these notices. Verbal consent was then obtained by participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and detailed notes were taken to document key points and contextual observations. These audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim into English and stored in encrypted files with unique identifying codes and all information that might identify the participant removed.

Data analysis employed a thematic approach to derive meaningful insights from participants' experiences with non-formal education (NFE). The transcriptions were coded by researchers using a process of open coding and axial

coding, enabling the data to be organised into themes that captured both individual narratives and collective insights. Individual country reports were created to capture the specific contextual nuances, and provide in-depth findings to the country teams. This report triangulates the findings from the desk research, the knowledge exchange workshop, the feasibility studies and the commensurate study in Myanmar, to offer a nuanced understanding of how NFE contributes to youth-led social change.

4.1 Limitations of the feasibility studies

Whilst the research team are immensely grateful to the British Council Ethiopia and Bangladesh and their partner organisations for facilitating access to participants for this research, this approach to participant selection highlights a potential limitation to this study, as it may have resulted in 'selection bias', for example with organisations selecting high achieving participants, and more active participants being more likely to take part. Further limitations of the feasibility studies include the relatively small number of participants who were interviewed, in comparison to the large number of young people who had been engaged in the Youth Connect programmes in the two countries. The results may not be representative of the full cohort of participants – particularly given the wide geographic spread of the programmes, which we were not able to capture in this research. Nonetheless, the findings from the feasibility studies provide rich, in-depth data representing the experiences of those young people engaged in this research. Key trends were identified in responses amongst these participants both within and across the two countries.

5. Findings

5.1 How does NFE promote youth empowerment and youth-led change?

Across the programmes studied, young people were very positive about the impact that engaging in the programmes had on their sense of selves, and their position in society. At a personal level, young people particularly discussed the impact the programmes had on their self-confidence, self-esteem and leadership skills. At a societal level, young people began to understand themselves as 'active citizens' and discussed realising the value of diversity within their country. This section will unpack these changes, first by examining the question of how these impacts were developed through the programmes, and then through a reflection on the implications this had for young people.

A focus on 'real life' issues
An element of the NFE programmes that young people tended to value most highly was their focus on 'real life' issues that affect their country today. Participants highlighted that this differs from what they learn in their formal education, which tends to have a largely theoretical focus, lacking discussion of contemporary issues and practical examples, as well as limited possibilities for applying their learning (a complaint echoed by young people across the world of formal education systems (British Council 2022). In Bangladesh, where training activities were based around global development challenges and specific SDGs, participants noted that, 'In school, college, or university, they do not teach us about current issues like gender equality and climate change. I did not have any idea about this before doing training in the LEAD Bangladesh program'

(NFE0202B). And 'they [academic institution] never taught us about things like SDGs or how to identify our personal strengths and weaknesses' (NFE0201B). In Ethiopia, whilst focusing less on the development challenges, participants repeated the claims that engaging in this non-formal education programme enabled learning about more practical issues, noting, for example, that 'formal education focused on scientific inquiry. The non-formal education, however, involves training on issues that will matter in our lives practically' (NFE0207E) and 'formal school education including university education focused on application of scientific knowledge based on information or theories, which may not be applied in the real-life situations. However, unlike formal education, this program is provided the lived experiences and real-life skills that trainees can easily apply in their day-to-day activities...' (NFE0213E). The study in Myanmar found that programmes addressed real life issues during crises, including empowering participants to navigate challenging and changing circumstances including martial law, repression, and community pressure, whilst at the same time, indirectly encouraging them to contribute to social change in response to the current repressive political climate.

Participatory methodologies
In the feasibility studies, the flexibility of NFE to engage different pedagogical approaches created spaces for experiential and participatory learning; with young participants learning not through simply being 'taught', but through embodied experiences. This experiential and participatory learning had a significant impact on how young people

were able to learn about these 'real world' topics, and enabled them to develop intrinsic skills such as 'leadership, advocacy, and communication skills' (NFE0202B).

In our knowledge exchange workshop, participants discussed how NFE programmes often differ from formal education because they can allow for deep, contextual learning from experience; echoing notions of transrational learning discussed in section 2. This was shown through the feasibility studies, where young people were not simply taught ideas, but developed skills through participatory pedagogical approaches in the workshops, that they then put into practice through their work with communities. Within the training, participants highlighted activities such as role playing, advocacy workshops, power walks and community mapping exercises. These activities enabled experiential and embodied learning:

> **[the training] emphasized active engagement, discussions, and debates. Rather than solely absorbing information passively, our active participation was encouraged in the learning process. This interactive environment fostered critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, enabling us to explore topics in a more dynamic and engaging way. (NFE0218E).**

> **There were also experiences brought to us in the training sessions. The experiences were important as they informed us what challenges life and opportunities life might bring in our future, and the ways out as well (NFE0208E).**

The training workshops therefore enabled young participants to become active learners; embedded in processes of co-creating knowledge through learning from one another's experience, and the perspectives of different groups in society. This enabled young people to engage critically and creatively with issues faced in their communities and development challenges. One participant explained, for example, that the participatory activities 'really helped us initially to think about what we were actually going to do, what could be done for society and to help the community, to fulfil the SDG goals as well' (NFE0202B).

The community deployment or social action projects then gave young people the chance to apply this learning; honing the skills they had developed through the workshop and enabling deeper experiential and embodied learning through this community work. Young people particularly valued this:

> **One significant difference was the emphasis on putting the acquired knowledge into practice. The training program provided opportunities for us to apply what we learned in real-life scenarios by engaging in the community, help the elderly etc. (NFE0218E)**

Similarities were found in Myanmar, where NFE programmes were often based on experiential learning. This included 'hands-on activities, peer interactions, and leadership opportunities' (p.44) including placements in community projects. This process enabled participants to cultivate skills around 'critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among participants, enabling them to challenge entrenched norms, embrace diversity, and advocate for positive changes within their communities' (p.46).

Interaction with diverse groups

In Ethiopia, this focus on experiential learning was made particularly pertinent because young people were interacting and working together with, and therefore learning about the experiences of, diverse groups. This included those from regions or ethnic groups that individuals had not previously had contact with, and may have held prejudicial views towards. These interactions took place through the training programmes, as well as through the community deployment, and created significant shifts in young people's perceptions of 'others' in their society. As one participant explained;

> **The general understanding I had before the training was very different. For instance, I rarely meet other people apart from my group; as a result, I have negative understanding about people from other social groups. However, after the training, I began understanding that other peoples or social groups are friendly, and a building block for our country. Through the program, I also got the chance to see new places [...] and visiting these places helped me to understand that Ethiopia is a very wide, rich, and can accommodate a considerable number of people without problem (NFE0214E).**

The act of young people interacting with other groups was therefore a substantial driver of a change in young peoples' attitudes about their country (unpacked further in section 5.1.2). Another participant articulated that it was not only the specific content of the programme that made a difference here, but the opportunity to share spaces with 'others': *'We were not only restricted to the formatted lessons provided to us by the program but also shared ideas, culture, and lived experiences*

on daily bases beside to the main training' (*NFE0215E*).

In Bangladesh, an, albeit smaller, number of participants commented on the role of the programme in bringing together participants from various backgrounds and communities, enriching the learning experience. One participant reflected on this diversity: *"In LEAD Bangladesh, when training in SDG 8, participants were from different backgrounds, ages, and communities [...] Non-formal education involves much diversity and differentiation, offering knowledge from various perspectives and sources'* (*NFE0203B*).

These opportunities to bring groups together who do not tend to encounter one another in their day-to-day life and formal education systems, can create spaces for transrational and embodied learning; where participants learn through their interactions with others, and how these interactions make individuals, and collectives, feel. This benefit of NFE was further articulated by participants in our knowledge exchange workshop, where participants highlighted the power of bringing groups of young people together – including those from very different backgrounds. Workshop participants asserted that there needs to be a clear understanding of the experiences of these different groups, and how they can come together through NFE work, but argued the substantial power that comes from this process, which creates spaces for young people to see their connections and shared experiences.

Skills development

Through these processes, young people began to develop intrinsic skills or soft skills, particularly discussing skills around leadership, community engagement and interpersonal and intercultural communication. In the knowledge exchange workshop, participants

discussed their experiences of young people being attracted to NFE programmes due to the promise of developing instrumental skills, but, upon finishing projects, valued the intrinsic skills they had developed the most. In their reflections on the feasibility studies, and in the findings in the Myanmar study, young people similarly focussed on this intrinsic skills development, highlighting – in the feasibility studies - that the community action programmes played a particularly important role in this skills development. Several participants across the contexts explained that before taking part in the programmes they were shy and introverted. However, engaging in the projects significantly improved their interpersonal communication, public speaking and leadership skills. As a participant explained:

> **Initially, I harboured fears about stepping out of my comfort zone, but the training served as a catalyst for personal growth, helping me overcome these apprehensions. As I delved into the program's activities and interacted with diverse individuals, my perspective of the world expanded significantly. I felt a deepened connection and understanding of the world around me, which brought me immense joy and a renewed sense of purpose. The program not only equipped me with valuable skills but also empowered me to navigate life with confidence and enthusiasm, fostering a sense of optimism for the future. (NFE0219E)**

Participants across the three contexts similarly discussed developing communication skills, both through the NFE project training and in their community work, as they worked with different community groups, across languages, and with diverse groups of young people. Program team members highlighted

the same. In Bangladesh, engagement with diaspora communities was considered by the project teams to be particularly instrumental as participants communicated across countries and generations.

5.1.2 Implications for young people
The real life, experiential, and transrational learning that young people gained through the programme had significant impacts on how young people viewed themselves, their society, and ultimately their role in society as active citizens, leaders, and changemakers.

Changed perceptions of society
Through the above mechanisms, the programmes changed young people's perception of societies in which they lived. In Ethiopia, this change, as already seen in some of the quotes above, particularly came in terms of respecting and valuing ethnic diversity in Ethiopia. Participants explained, for example, that:

> **The program helped me to understand that Ethiopia is the home of several people, nations, and nationalities. Alongside, all people, nations, and nationalities are equal no matter how they speak, behave, or they came from. Our country is the mosaic of cultures and nationalities, and the people deserves to live in peace and peaceful co-existence. (NFE0216E)**

> **The training was important to me with regards to what I used to think about ethnic identity. It helped me realize cultural diversity and the need to live with others in harmony. Now I know I shall not be narrow nationalist as it could be devastating for my country and me as well (NFE0207E).**

These quotes echo shifts towards attitudes of peacebuilding amongst the young participants; with a recognition of the harm caused by discriminatory practices, cultural diversity understood as a positive part of day-to-day life, and calls not only for the cessation of violence but for equal treatment and 'harmony' in society.

In Bangladesh, where the focus of the programme was designed less around peacebuilding, young people's understanding of their society often changed in relation to understandings of societal issues – generally in line with the specific issues they had been studying as part of the programme. Participants highlighted, for example, changing understandings about the impact of climate change in their country. One young participant noted,

'Yes, it changed the way I think about climate change. Right after the training, whenever I went to any gatherings or discussions, I tried to talk about climate change and make people aware of this. Before the training, I was not concerned about climate issues and did things that could harm the climate. After the training, I became aware of how our little steps can affect or change the climate' (NFE0202B).

Others were impacted more broadly in terms of recognising development challenges their country faces. One participant noted that *'participating in the program has fundamentally altered how I view social issues. It has broadened my perspective and deepened my commitment to addressing community challenges'* (NFE02011B).

Change in perception of place in society
As the above quotes demonstrate, the embodied learning and development of skills

resulted in young people changing their perception of their place in society. This came, in part, due to the significant positive impact on young people's self-esteem and self-confidence, which enabled them to see themselves as important societal actors. Participants, for example, explained that:

Before the training my self-esteem was very low. I didn't see myself as important. The training made me realise that I am one of the people who constitute the futures of the country. I realised I matter as a person, and I had contributions to make (NFE0208E).

I now have a tangible improvement in my self-esteem and self-perception. The training empowered me to recognize my own strengths and capabilities, encouraging me to embrace my identity as a young person with the potential to make meaningful contributions to my community and society (NFE0227E).

My thinking used to be that I couldn't make a significant impact [...] I never thought I could make a meaningful contribution in my community. This program has made a significant difference in how I perceive myself and my capabilities before and after participating in it (NFE0201B).

These quotes demonstrate a significant shift from young people feeling unable to make changes to their society, considering themselves as passive actors, to having both the rights and the ability to act as change-makers where they can make *'a tangible*

difference in my own community' (NFE0207B). Participants expressly put this down to the training they had received, which had given them both the skills and the knowledge needed to enact change. As one participant noted *'Previously, when I lacked awareness and training… I struggled to initiate action. But now… I see opportunities to engage"* (NFE0202OB).

In Myanmar, through NFE programmes that equipped learners with practical skills as well as the more intrinsic skills highlighted above, young people developed a desire to take these skills to their communities and contribute to community development through delivering free training and community initiatives. Participants who had been engaged in programmes on digital skills, for example, discussed a desire to share these skills with elderly and younger generations to help safeguard their computer use. Another participant discussed running community activities after engaging in NFE programming:

> **'Armed with acquired skills and knowledge: research, computer, English, and guitar, I return to my native village and share them with young people by organizing a free learning hub that lasts three months per batch' (Myanmar participant).**

Moreover, despite programmes having to limit their explicit activities around peacebuilding in the face of security concerns, young participants in Myanmar discussed their intentions to utilise the skills they had developed through NFE programmes towards peacebuilding. Including through 'organising sharing sections, discussion, and awareness training to local people' (Myanmar participant) that focused on promoting equality and inclusion between ethnic groups in Myanmar, reducing gender-based violence, and applying

practical skills for peacebuilding ends. As one participant stated:

> **'I am committed to building a peaceful community because I don't want to see the next generation keep getting involved in ongoing conflicts. It is my mission to utilize the skills and knowledge, such as human rights, law, and IT, which I have acquired through my participation in the NFE programme to contribute to this endeavour.' (Myanmar participant)**

Importantly, across the projects this learning instilled a sense of hope in young people, who were able to develop new imaginaries of their country's future, grounded in a belief that individual actions, such as community service and advocacy for social change, can, collectively, lead to a brighter future. This was facilitated through the community programmes in which young people could see the changes they were making in society. As one young person commented:

> **The program has transformed my thinking about my country and community's future. It has expanded my vision, instilled a sense of responsibility, and motivated me to actively contribute to building a better future for Ethiopia and community. I am now more engaged, proactive, and optimistic about the potential for positive change in the years to come (NFE0218E).**

In short, young people began to see themselves as leaders who can take action to address the issues that they experience or see in their communities. As a participant in Bangladesh proclaimed *'Now, I can see myself as a good youth leader!'* (NFE0207B).

Understandings of the collective power of young people

As well as changing young people's perceptions of themselves individually, the programmes also worked to develop a sense of 'youth' as a collective and the potential power that lies in that collectivism. As we will see in section 5.5, this is no small thing; with young people having to overcome community scepticism about the abilities and positions of young people as changemakers. Overcoming these barriers, young people note that *'the program has empowered me to recognize the significant role that young people can play in shaping the future of our country and contributing to positive change in our communities'* (NFE0223E) and *'From this kind of project, the youth of Bangladesh can develop themselves and also work to solve the problems of society''* (NFE0208B).

Through invoking the collective this way, the participants demonstrate how the programmes led young people to understand the collective potential of young people in making positive social changes. As a participant in Bangladesh neatly surmised 'I felt like, I am a young person, I can do it!' (NFE0204B).

Having unpacked the impact of embodied, experiential learning through participatory methodologies on young people's sense of self, sense of community and sense of collectivism, the next section will provide some examples of youth-led social change enabled through the feasibility studies. Throughout the remaining sections, we will also see a critical reflection on the sustainability of this change, particularly in reference to the sometimes constraining contexts in which these programmes worked.

5.2 Examples of youth-led change

Through their engagement in the social action programmes, in Ethiopia and Bangladesh, young people contributed to real change in their communities. The programmes young people participated in were wide and varied. In Myanmar, participants similarly discussed engaging in a wide range of community programmes during and following their participation in NFE programmes. This section will explore a small snapshot of activities that young people participated in, as described by themselves and/or the programme leaders and facilitators[5].

5   *Please note that references to direct quotes have been removed from this section of the report, to ensure the anonymity of participants.*

Bangladesh

Creating gender inclusive health facilities
In Bangladesh, a group of young people noticed in their local healthcare facility that there were two queues for accessing services: one for women and one for men. Transgender and hijra ('third gender') people – who already experience significant marginalisation in Bangladesh - were not welcome in these spaces, and experienced discrimination in accessing healthcare services. The young people *'conducted one-to-one sessions with the community, initiated meetings with hospital directors, and successfully persuaded the Director, a highly respected figure in our country, to issue a circular granting privileges to third gender individuals for healthcare access in hospitals. This directive also instructed other hospitals to provide privileges to transgender people seeking healthcare services [...]. This was a small initiative but had a significant impact'.*

Supporting maternal nutrition
Recognising malnutrition as a major issue in Bangladesh, one group of young people decided to work with a maternity centre in their community. They began the project by talking to the management of the centre, and through this process learned that there was no nutrition department there, and no space where mothers could go to ask questions about nutrition. The group went to the Chief Health Officer of their city to present this issue and their approach for tackling it, obtaining official letters that would let them work with the health centre. They developed monthly sessions in the health centre which mothers could attend, in which administrators, doctors and health officers were present to answer questions about nutrition. In addition to this, the group also produced and distributed leaflets about maternal nutrition and had one-to-one conversations with the mothers and their families about malnutrition.

Raising awareness of the right to information and local government services
A group of young people identified that many people in their country and community do not know they have the right to information and the associated possibility of obtaining this information from their local government. Within their community, they found a lack of information and awareness as to the services and facilities that are available through the local government. Community members, for example, did not know of services such as old age allowances; support for disabled people; the ability to obtain a birth certificate through the local government; and support for pregnant and new mothers and babies including maternity allowances, access to food and treatment during pregnancy. Some believed that, in order to access these services, they could not go directly to their local councillor and instead that they must go through an intermediary. Such intermediaries charge high fees to access allowances or services on behalf of community members (one participant noted that in their community, parents paid intermediaries 2,000-3,000 taka to obtain a birth certificate, which it is possible to obtain directly from the local government office for 50 taka).

To address these challenges, the group of young people sought to raise community awareness about the rights and services that community members could access through their local government. They connected with 'teachers, head teachers of local educational institutes, Imams of the mosques, local journalists, heads of madrasas, other leaders of local organizations, and young people' to produce and disseminate an awareness campaign highlighting that people have the right to directly access their local councillor for

support. The group created and distributed leaflets, spoke directly with community members, and, working with the councillor, produced a citizen charter to enable the community to learn where they could access different information and services.

Ethiopia

Community engagement

In Ethiopia, rather than developing specific community-based programmes as in Bangladesh, individual participants often each engaged in a wide variety of activities during their volunteer placements. Many participants, for example, discussed engaging in community clean-up activities alongside the community, assisting with harvesting crops, and engaging in fundraising activities to raise money for the elderly to provide for necessities such as food and clothing, or for community services such as health centres. The majority of participants discussed their work helping the elderly or vulnerable in society in different ways, including through providing company, assisting with daily tasks, and building or renovating people's homes.

Supporting the elderly and vulnerable in communities

Participants described the value of their interpersonal work with vulnerable groups in Ethiopia, highlighting the 'interpersonal efforts' that they engaged in: 'visiting and providing companionship to the elderly or offering support and comfort to patients in the local clinics. Those one-on-one interactions, where we could really listen to people's stories and meet their basic human needs, were incredibly humbling and fulfilling. They reminded me that sometimes the simplest acts of service can make the biggest difference in someone's life'.

Developing community infrastructure

In addition to building and renovating homes for vulnerable members of the community, participants discussed young people constructing a bridge between 'previously disconnected

communities'. One participant explained that the *'infrastructure project had a profound impact, as it re-established crucial transportation links and enabled the free flow of people, goods, and resources between the two communities. The process of fundraising, planning, and executing this bridge-building project was a deeply collaborative effort, involving various stakeholders and community representatives'.*

Assisting with agricultural developments
Participants engaged in agricultural activities including harvesting crops, but also assisted in developing irrigation systems and worked to make agricultural processes more efficient. Participants, for example, explained engaging in digging for irrigation, flood control measures, and terracing to prevent soil erosion. Explaining the importance of this work, one participant explained that *'you could see people gathered up* [...] *in abundance to fetch water. Gazing at the crowd, one could simply observe the plight the people were facing out of shortage of water'.* Creative methods were used to encourage community participation in the activities, for instance *'by reciting poems to the crow standing at a podium'.*

Myanmar

Reducing gender-based violence
The Myanmar report gives examples of several participants who engaged in programmes to reduce gender-based violence in their communities. One participant, for example, explained: *'Utilizing the skills and knowledge acquired through NFE, I successfully conducted an awareness training session on domestic violence and gender discrimination for a group of 60 villagers in rural areas. Their response highlighted the importance and relevance of addressing such issues within their community'.*

Empowering women
One participant in Myanmar noted how they had been able to embed their learning from engaging in an NFE programme into their work focussed on women's empowerment: *'After completing the NFE programme, I transitioned into a role as a project assistant with a CSO, where I contributed to addressing community issues. One of my notable accomplishments was securing funding for a project aimed at raising awareness about women's empowerment, women's rights, child protection, and gender-based discrimination. The project proved highly effective, as evidenced by the positive feedback we received from participants.'*

Building peace with religious leaders
Another participant discussed the role they had played in contributing to peacebuilding, through engaging with religious leaders across communities: *'After the NFE programme we have joined, we successfully conducted a research paper focused on religious conflict studies* [...]*. Using research findings, we organize motivated young leaders locally and discuss with religious leaders to give awareness training about how to build a peace mindset to local people.'*

These examples provide a small snapshot of the community change activities young people successfully carried out in communities – their experience of which also supported their changed attitudes to their role in these communities.

5.3 Impact of NFE on youth employability

A driver of young people participating in NFE programmes can be to enhance their employability through skills development. In the knowledge exchange workshops, participants discussed that young people are often motivated to join NFE programmes for instrumental reasons, asking themselves *'What skills are they going to develop? What tangible things can they get out of it?'* (*KE Workshop Participant*). Indeed, in Ethiopia, high levels of youth unemployment were one of the key drivers for young people participating in the programme, with many participants being *'university graduates without a job opportunity'* (*NFE0214E*). Participants in the study frequently referred to the lack of opportunities available for young University graduates, noting their desperation at not being able to access a job, and the community stigma surrounding going to university and remaining unemployed.

Enhancing employability is not a part of Youth Connect's theory of change. However, given young people may be incentivised to take part in NFE programmes to enhance their employability, and that they identified developing a number of important skills through the programme, it is worthwhile examining whether young people feel their engagement has enhanced their employability. There were mixed responses from young people on this question. In Bangladesh, participants' responses strongly depended on whether or not they had participated specifically on training around SDG8; those who hadn't, did not discuss the programmes having an impact. Those that had, spoke at length about the lessons they had learnt around social entrepreneurship. In Ethiopia, some participants said the programmes had had no impact on their employability, whereas others also spoke about entrepreneurship and skills taught through the programme such as job interview techniques, and CV development.

In Ethiopia, participants discussed that attending the session on entrepreneurship changed their outlook on employment; showing them that they could create employment for themselves. Participants noted, for example:

'The training has not affected my employability. However, I learnt a lot in the training including the need to start one's own business. The lesson I got about entrepreneurship is helping me look for mechanisms to secure a means of living apart from employment by government.' (NFE0207E).

'The emphasis on entrepreneurship, in particular, has proven to be of great significance in enabling young graduates to create their own employment opportunities and contribute to the country's economic development.' (NFE0218E).

In Bangladesh, young people who had received training on SDG8 discussed learning the practicalities of setting up an enterprise, as well as the benefits of job creation in their communities through entrepreneurship, noting, for example, that *'After this training, I became aware of the importance of creating decent jobs and ensuring fair work conditions. We discussed various strategies to enhance economic growth in our community, such as promoting entrepreneurship and skills development'* (*NFE0209B*). In particular, their focus was on what they learnt regarding social entrepreneurship in the training. Participants

explained that they had learnt the importance of gender equality and ensuring female participation in entrepreneurship, that a person's business should *'not only be profitable for me but should also contribute positively to society'* (NFE0211B) and the need to *'to prioritize those who are marginalized and to ensure our employees feel safe'* (NFE0203B). Participants therefore learnt practical skills for developing socially responsible businesses. Similarly in Myanmar, young people participated in programmes that offered guidance on entrepreneurship *'including tips on starting and managing businesses, sourcing materials, and effective customer communication'* (*Myanmar participant*).

Such a focus on youth entrepreneurship is relatively common in contexts facing high levels of youth unemployment, and the focus of many interventions because of its potential to bring young people out of unemployment. However, it should be noted – in line with the Changing the Story youth campaign mentioned above - that entrepreneurship can also push young people into precarity, particularly when there is a lack of social and structural mechanisms to support them through the process of creating a business, and in case their business does not succeed. Such precarity is enhanced for young people from low-income and marginalised backgrounds, and those in already precarious contexts. Indeed, one participant in Bangladesh already felt the difficulties of a lack of wider support for entrepreneurs, noting: *'We had great ideas for promoting economic growth and decent work, but the lack of resources and support from local authorities made it difficult to put our plans into action. We need more support to make a real impact'* (NFE0211B). In Myanmar, it was found that fostering a 'supportive ecosystem' (p.35) was crucial in enabling graduate success. Here, then, we return to the notion of ecologies of action, and the

need to ensure programmes are embedded within, and seeking to affect, wider supportive environments that enable young people to implement the skills and knowledge they have gained through participating in a project, after that project is finished.

In Ethiopia, some participants also reflected on the impact that developing the 'soft skills', as discussed above, had on their employability. They noted, for example, that, *'the program played a role more in enhancing my inter-personal communication skills. In fact, the training positively influenced my employability too'* (*Young Participant, NFE0215*). Yet it is notable that whilst almost all participants across the two feasibility studies noted developing these soft skills, many did not link the connection of these skills to notions of employability. This differed to projects in the Myanmar study, that were identified as having a measurable impact on participants' employment. Following a programme not dissimilar to those in Ethiopia and Bangladesh, where participants engaged in internships and then implemented community projects based on the skills they had developed, 85% of participants were found to have applied 'their newfound skills to access higher education or secure employment in fields aligned with their interests, such as NGOs, INGOs, and CSOs' (p.33). This was achieved particularly through an increase in leadership and communication skills and self-confidence, as well as through developing project management skills. This project demonstrates that the soft skills learnt through NFE programmes can be directly transferable to employability. It suggests that young people in this Myanmar case were well equipped in articulating the skills that they gained, which was perhaps missing in Ethiopia and Bangladesh (although it should be noted that enhancing employability was not the main aims of these Youth Connect programmes).

Finally, a number of participants in Ethiopia highlighted that they hoped that they would earn a living through the programme, and expected to obtain a job through the programme. Participants discussed their disappointment with this 'discrepancy' as well as the pressure it put on them as a result of family and community expectations that they would leave the programme with a job. This unfulfilled expectation had a tangible effect on participants, who discussed feeling 'hopeless' as they had given up on other training or paused their hunt for a job to take part in the programme. Such an example highlights the importance of setting realistic expectations with young participants of programmes, as well as using programmes to address the issues most pertinent to them.

5.4 NFE Programmes and gender

As a topic within the programmes studied in the feasibility studies, gender equality was found to be embedded particularly within the LEAD Bangladesh programme. Participants discussed learning about gender equality in the training of the programme. Demonstrating the importance of experiential learning, participants discussed the use of role playing and power walks in learning about persistent gender inequality between different genders (including transgender people), the notion that gender is a social construct, and the importance of promoting gender equality in society. For some, particularly male, participants this was a subject they had not previously engaged with, and so it provided important insights and spaces for attitudinal and behavioural change. For other, particularly female, participants, this understanding of gender (in)equality and the importance of advocacy was well known, but engaging in the programme strengthened and reinforced their beliefs. Again, the embodied learning played

an important role here, as one participant described:

> **When we get the chance to talk, we talk equally with everyone. It's not like you are a male; you will talk first, and I am a girl; I will talk shortly. This kind of thing never happens. For instance, during role plays, roles were not assigned based on gender. As I have mentioned, there is a role play where we have to play various roles as politicians and transgender people. It was a very vital issue in the session. All the roles were present in a shuffled way. It was not like, 'You are a girl, so you will play the role of disabled, and the boys will be politicians.' […]. Even in other participation, if we have to write something, the person who raises their hand will get the opportunity. It's not like I am a girl; I will get the opportunity first… (NFE0204B)**

Another female participant mentioned the fact that girls were frequently given the opportunity to do presentations on the programme, which they described (positively) as 'a kind of an upside-down situation. Naturally, girls do not get the chance for presentations.' (NFE0216B). One female participant explained:

> **'[…] I already possessed the belief that my gender should not hinder my ability to work, and I should not compromise on my safety due to my gender. Therefore, while the training didn't significantly alter my thinking, it provided valuable reinforcement and contextualization of these principles' (NFE0209B).**

The programme then had different impacts depending on the level of awareness and engagement participants had previously had in addressing issues of gender; but was valuable even to those who had experience and knowledge of gender (in)equality as it played a role in reinforcing their beliefs and practices. Facilitators on the programme observed that LEAD Bangladesh significantly contributed to breaking down previous notions of gender roles. Through the above-mentioned activities, they found that initial discomfort between male and female participants improved significantly, enhancing comfort and collaboration in promoting gender equality.

The Myanmar study suggests that gender was also included in many of the NFE programmes within the country, and identifies programmes that specifically work to enhance 'women's participation and influence' (p.18) in community, workplace, and educational environments, such as the Myanmar Women Programme. This programme employs a flexible approach so that it can be adapted to meet the needs of different cohorts, based on their experiences and roles in society. Further programmes incorporate a gender-based approach to understanding peacebuilding; demonstrating how gender-based violence, sexual violence and discrimination are all embedded within conflict, and so must be addressed in peacebuilding processes.

Both the Myanmar and Bangladesh study demonstrate examples of how this learning around gender has been put into practice beyond the duration of the programme. In Myanmar, for example, a participant explained that:

Utilizing the skills and knowledge acquired through NFE, I successfully conducted an awareness training session on domestic violence and gender discrimination for a group of 60 villagers in rural areas. Their response highlighted the importance and relevance of addressing such issues within their community.' (Myanmar participant)

In Bangladesh, another participant noted:

Before the training, I didn't know how to do this effectively. Regarding gender equity, there was a tradition at my university where class representatives were always male. After the training, I advocated for equal opportunities, and in the next semester, one of my female friends became a class representative. This was a real-life application of what I learned. I believe these principles can be applied in every sector. (NFE0215B)

However, the studies still demonstrate significant gaps in addressing gender within project activities. In Bangladesh, for example, whilst purporting to have learnt about gender as a social construct, a couple of male participants continued to express beliefs about the particular jobs that men and women are most suited for, noting, for example, that *'Although women lag behind in physically demanding jobs, they are more proficient in marketing tasks'* and *'activities like handcrafts are often better suited to women's skills'* (*NFE0203B*). Despite teaching on issues of gender then, some participants still left with preconceptions about gendered roles in society.

Moreover, in both Ethiopia and Bangladesh, there was found to be uneven participation of females in programme activities, particularly within the social action programmes and volunteering activities, largely due to entrenched social and patriarchal norms.

Programmes generally discuss having equal opportunities to engage in the programme, but it is clear that this does not translate to equal participation. Programme team members in Ethiopia held different views on this; some highlighted that specific methodologies were employed to enable a balanced representation of both males and females and that gender balance and inclusivity in the programmes was actively promoted. However, other participants highlighted that, despite a high number of females taking part in the programme, they were not able to participate in the same way. Programme team members noted, for example, that:

> **Women's participation in the program was minimal, to the extent that it could be described as almost non-existent. Although their numbers were significant, their active involvement was notably lacking (NFE0130E).**

> **Enhancing the safeguarding measures to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants, especially women, is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive environment. (NFE0102E)**

The first of these quotes exemplifies that simply having girls and women enrolled on programmes does not equate to gender equality through programmes, where barriers are in place that prevent them from fully engaging and participating in programme activities. The second of these quotes is particularly in reference to participants who were engaged in community deployment, where female participants reported feeling unsafe being deployed to remote areas of the country to take part in volunteering activities. The programme team highlighted that a part of the role of the 'Strengthening the ENVY-SP

programme' included identifying and working to address these gender-based issues.

In Bangladesh, one of the facilitators highlighted that there were significantly more female programme participants than there were male participants:

> **'Here, in this program, most of the participants were female. The male participants were very few in numbers. For example, if we were conducting a training session for 20 people, 4-5 of them were male and the rest were female [...] It was really alarming for us that the female members were participating in much higher numbers. Whenever the ratio for any gender is higher, the rest of the people think that if we talk, our opinion won't be granted. In that case, it cannot be really participatory. Even in the session on Gender and Sex, few male participants were responding, and the females were not responding [...] Though there are higher numbers of females, female participants are still rigid in our society to talk about topics like Sex and Gender in front of men' (NFE0303B).**

This demonstrates how gender norms within the society affected how participants – and particularly female participants – were limited in their participation in the programme, despite their much higher number. Some young female participants also reflected this when describing their participation in the social action programmes, where they found their male counterparts were much more likely to dominate decision making. One participant described, for example, that 'during decision-making, it was often male dominated', they explained:

'[...] it would be beneficial if they could engage more females in the social action projects. While they ensured an equal split between male and female participants, from a safety perspective, males often feel more privileged to take the lead. In some cases, community members were hesitant to engage with female participants. It's true that safeguarding rules were explained, but not everyone grasped their importance. [...]. Everyone should feel they have the right to speak up without fearing repercussions on their work. Therefore, more focus is needed to ensure clear understanding and active participation.' (NFE0212B)

Again, we can see that despite large numbers of females taking part in the programming, their participation can be limited by entrenched gender-norms, in which males often understand their role as the 'leader', female participants are more hesitant or shy, and in which community members are less likely to work with young people who aren't male. These limitations on engagement and participation are further compounded by higher drop-out rates amongst girls in both Ethiopia and Bangladesh, reported to be a result of early marriage, family commitments, and safety concerns – including concerns around travelling to the training sites and community engagement. Programmes are, therefore, further constrained in what they are able to achieve in addressing gender norms, by the social structures in which they are based. Programmes are making some positive steps towards addressing issues of gender within the focus of their activities, but more needs to be done to enable the genuine participation of non-male participants in programme activities and in enabling equitable processes between genders during these activities.

5.5 The role of stakeholder engagement in NFE programming

Stakeholders play a key role in the success of NFE programmes, but how stakeholders are engaged (or not) can also constrain what projects are able to achieve. Examining the impact of three groups of stakeholders, this section will particularly examine the engagement of young people in shaping programme design and how this impacts youth participation, the role of organisational partnerships in enabling or constraining projects, and the impact of wider community perceptions on the success and sustainability of programming.

5.5.1 Engagement of young people

There is growing understanding of the importance of engaging those with whom a project will work in the design of the project, to ensure it meets their needs and has their full buy-in. In our knowledge exchange workshops, participants highlighted the need for young people to be engaged in programming as equitable partners, with programmes running on models of shared ownership that means they are accountable to young people throughout their duration. Workshop participants argued that trust is crucial if participants are to fully engage with programmes, and shared ownership is the best way of reaching the required level of trust. Moreover, it also ensures the sustainability of the effects of programmes, as they will be fully tailored to the needs of the young people with whom they work.

In the feasibility studies, we therefore examined if and how young people had been engaged in the design and development of the NFE programme, and whether they felt a sense of ownership over the programmes. The programme teams in both contexts explained how they had taken an evidence-based approach to designing their projects. In Bangladesh, for example, the programme team explained that The British Council used the youth survey and Next Generation Research to determine young people's priorities, and inform the program's design. A programme team member explained, 'We ask young people about their priorities at regular intervals... these are kind of the concerning elements to young people' (NFE0102B). In 2015 when the last survey was conducted, 'climate, employment was quite prominent' (NFE0102B) and so this focus formed the basis of the LEAD Bangladesh programme. In Ethiopia, the British Council worked to strengthen the ENVY-SP programme, working with RTG and IA to revise and shape the modules to better meet the needs and interests of young people. Young people were actively consulted throughout this process. The module revisions were informed by feedback collected from young volunteers through a survey questionnaire, with survey results considered during the revisions.

For young participants in Bangladesh, the fact that the majority of young participants interviewed actively developed their own social action projects helped to contribute to their sense of ownership of the programme. Section 5.1 above demonstrates the positive effect this had on the skills and lessons young people learnt on the project, which led to projects in the country that dealt effectively with complex, and sometimes contentious issues. Participants were complementary of the support they received from the British Council through this process, with one noting, for example, that:

'When we were working, they provided us with support, which improved the quality of our work rather than decreasing it. Many of us had not been engaged in this type of work before. However, because their suggestions and involvement were always there,

our motivation to work increased. This is why we were able to handle and solve many problems smoothly. Their support definitely helped us to work effectively (NFE0213B).

In Ethiopia, the programme team discussed developing a youth association that would take ownership of the programme and contribute to its continued development as one facilitator noted:

'Young people were not involved in the planning or development of the programme, but now hopefully the newly established Youth Association will enable the young people to be involved more in the planning and development and eventually once they gain all the necessary skills, they will be able to coordinate the programme (NFE0104).

It is believed by the programme team that this would be a positive step forward in addressing gaps that a non-engagement of young people in the programme design creates, as well as creating a strong, sustainable network of young people contributing to youth-led change.

As this quote alludes to, of the young participants that we interviewed, none had been involved in designing the programmes. Many young participants believed that youth engagement in the programme design, as well as more consistent spaces for monitoring and feedback from participants during the programme, could have led to its improvement in several areas. As participants themselves explained:

'I strongly believe that involving youth in the planning and designing of programs, including training modules, is essential. We may bring

a new perspective and unique ideas not known to the experts. They may not know our needs, aspirations, and challenges. (NFE0218E)

In addition, youth involvement fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment. When young people given the opportunity to contribute to the planning and design of programs, they feel valued and recognized as active agents of change. This sense of ownership motivates them to actively participate in the program, take responsibility for their own growth, and become ambassadors for positive change within their communities.' (NFE0218E)

'If they had taken opinions from volunteers like us, we would have been more motivated and interested. If we had the chance to express our opinions, everyone would have been more engaged and willing to participate in the program. But since the youth saw that they had to work on a specifically designed project, some left or got distracted from the program. (NFE0217B)

As these young people explained, and echoing participants in the knowledge exchange workshops, young participants believed that engaging young people in the programme design could lead to a greater sense of ownership, greater buy in, and more sustained engagement from young people, who themselves are the best experts of their own experiences and needs.

Participants in both feasibility study contexts also highlighted the need for greater monitoring and feedback through the programme – with some directly calling for this – so that adjustments could have been made to ensure the programmes were more inclusive, effective and enjoyable. Section 5.4, for example, already demonstrates how such an approach may have helped to address unequal gendered participation in the projects. Furthermore, in both contexts, participants felt like they did not have enough money and resources to effectively engage in the programmes and fulfil their community programme. In Bangladesh, for example, a participant noted that *'We were given 5000 BDT! So, within 5000 BDT, doing two seminars and meeting with our team members was tough… I think there were some shortcomings in the budget'* (NFE02019B). In Ethiopia, participants noted that budget restraints affected what they were able to do in the community, noting that *'We even design to help people who are in need; however, we failed to put it in to practice because of shortage of finance'* (NFE0214E). A small number of participants discussed having to use their own resources to fund projects, noting that an absence of resources meant that they were required to 'to pool resources for necessities, such as purchasing notice boards for community announcements' and that in order to meet community needs *'sometimes meant going without ourselves, as we did when we collectively gave up our meat dinners, a significant part of our diet. With the money saved, we purchased much-needed textbooks for students from underprivileged backgrounds'* (NFE0220E). Such financial constraints can impact which young people are able to engage in programmes, and how they are able to engage. Embedding consistent monitoring into programmes would ensure that these issues can be addressed in the short term, and prevent them from leading to issues of inclusivity in programmes.

Discussions in the knowledge exchange workshops highlighted that engaging participants as equitable partners can also be a good mechanism for preventing these issues from occurring. One workshop participant explained, for example that:

'[The project team] wanted to do graffiti […] But when we left, the young people were interested in more intergenerational interviews and we thought, oh, okay, this is great. And really, it required really less resources to actually do the work' (KE Workshop Participant)

This demonstrates that handing the reigns to young participants – experts on their own communities - to understand the type of activities they want to engage in, enables them to drive projects in ways that are most meaningful within the contexts that they work, but also most feasible with the resources that young people, communities, and projects have available.

It should be noted that the limited engagement of young people in programme design, and limited follow-up is far from a unique issue for these particular programmes. Throughout this research, participants have discussed this as an ongoing challenge in donor-driven programmes - where programmes often have to be designed quickly to meet funding calls, limiting the possibility for collaboration in programme design; funding is only offered for limited durations; and accountability in existing development practice is often to donors, rather than to the participants of programmes. We arrive here then to the notion of ecologies of action; the need for programmes to be situated within, and develop, ecologies of support that are both situated within the current system, and seeking to address the issues of that system.

In the knowledge exchange workshop, for example, a participant discussed the power embedded in programmes, and the need for:

'Accountability to young people to be hardwired into the projects, so that it couldn't be squeezed out [...] one of the really key things [...] is about asking everybody involved in the project, "how has your practice, or how has the decision that you have made, been impacted by a decision made by a young person?" So, making it clear that the young people are central to the decision-making process of a project, and that young people are changing the practice of that project' (KE workshop participant).

Therefore, whilst recognising the constraints of existing systems, factoring in youth engagement in the development of projects, as well as continued monitoring of their experience of the project continues to be crucial to ensuring young people can participate equitably in programmes, and that programmes continue to meet the changing needs of young participants.

5.5.2 Organisational partnerships

Partnerships between organisations have been central to the development and delivery of the different projects studied in this research, as well as central to the work of participants engaged in the knowledge exchange workshops. Participants have discussed the benefits of partnerships in expanding the reach of programmes, with organisations able to work with considerably more young people through their collaborations together. This has included working with governmental bodies or international organisations, whose visibility means they are able to reach larger groups of young people, as well as through working with country-based and locally based

partners, that already work with networks of young people who can be easily re-engaged and remobilised for further NFE and social action programmes. Similarly, engaging in partnerships has enabled different organisational expertise to shape different elements of programming, including technical programme support and management, the design of programme materials and curricula, the delivery of programming, and work on the sustainability of projects. Partnership work can help to financially support programmes, providing finances or resources such as venues, accommodation and food. They can also help to ensure programmes are integrated into communities (the importance of which is discussed below).

As was discussed in the knowledge exchange workshops, there is a need in programmes for expertise from people who 'understand intimately the challenges that young people are facing' (KE Workshop participant). Country-based organisations can still be 'outsiders' to the communities that young people are a part of, and so developing partnerships with community level organisations, or issue-based organisations, who have this knowledge and expertise can play a significant role in ensuring that programmes are both accessible for different groups of young people, and meet their needs and desires. Fostering partnerships between organisations has also resulted in ongoing work between organisations, meaning that previous programming has been built on and developed, with the lessons learnt feeding into new NFE programming for young people. This has led participants to discuss the need to 'nurture relationships between organisations' (KE Workshop participant)., creating networks able to work together towards youth-led change.

However, whilst partnerships often have a significantly positive relationship on programming, they are not always positive or

even neutral. As a participant in the knowledge exchange workshop noted, there is a need to 'take seriously the kinds of powers and relationships and constraints which face civil society actors looking to provide non-formal education for youth-led change' (KE Workshop participant). These power dynamics can affect how programmes are engaged with and perceived by programme participants and the communities with which they work. In conflict-affected contexts or in programmes addressing sensitive or contentious topics, for example, this research has found that partnering with organisations considered to hold a particular political or ideological position can result in uncertainty as to the aims of a programme – notably around whether its purpose is to pursue these political or ideological positions. This leads to a lack of trust, particularly amongst those 'outside' of the programme itself such as in the communities or regimes in which a project is based. In Ethiopia, where political tensions and conflict continue between different ethnic groups and the government, there was found to be a significant distrust of volunteers in communities because of their association with the Ministry of Peace. In Myanmar, mistrust was found to come from the regime, who may be suspicious of programmes they fear may produce anti-government sentiment. Such mistrust in complex settings can cause difficulties to a project itself, making it difficult to pursue the aims of the project and carry out activities in a constrained environment. It can also directly endanger the young participants of programmes, who may face physical harm, detainment, and (long term) ostracization if they are seen to be affiliated with organisations or entities who are not trusted in the context in which they are based. Partnerships therefore need to be carefully considered; not only to ensure they are coherently developed to support the full scope of a project, but also to ensure they do no harm

to the participants they engage, safeguarding young people involved in NFE programming.

Safeguarding can also be an issue in programmes because NFE can create spaces for discussion and action that are not tolerated or allowed in wider society; again, putting participants at risk both when they are participating in NFE programmes, and after these programmes are finished. As a participant of the knowledge exchange workshop noted, for example:

'All the things that we are attempting to do […] in post conflict settings to try to open up the realms of the possible, imagine new futures, etc etc, can be very problematic and can put people at risk. And so that needs to be built into it, I think… So that's why we get into safeguarding. What's very interesting, of course, is safeguarding is also very situated. So, I think it's important when we put these projects together that you have a very kind of coproduced notion of what safeguarding means, so that you both are cognizant of the reality of the situation that you're working in…' (KE Workshop participant).

Partnership work therefore needs to address safeguarding issues head on; assessing the specific contexts in which programmes are working, and ensuring that the programmes themselves, and the partnerships within them, will do no harm those the programme (intends to) work with.

5.5.3 The community
The comments above demonstrate the significant impact that community stakeholders can have on a project's delivery and ability to meet its aims, which has been another key finding of this project.

As discussed above, community mistrust over young people – particularly when the volunteers are perceived as being associated through their engagement in the programme with entities that are not trusted in the community - can cause significant difficulties and serious problems in projects. This can include challenges in setting up a programme in areas that may be suspicious of its activities and challenges for young people in engaging with the community, with them needing to spend substantial effort and time developing trust amongst community members. This can be a positive process; with organisations and young people building capacity in fostering trust and inclusive relationships. On the other hand, as discussed, it can also result in serious harm being done to participants, in the form of physical harm, detention, and ostracization – demonstrating the need for robust monitoring and safeguarding processes.

In Myanmar, the research found that mistrust can also occur amongst the community when programmes clash with community norms and values, 'particularly when they conflict with modern educational approaches or gender equality principles' (p.61). For example, the researchers found that programmes that teach on sexual and reproductive health and rights were considered inappropriate by community members, who restrict young people from participating in these programmes.

A failure to engage the community and gain the support of the community impacts the sustainability of programmes, as communities resist their work, and young people who have participated in programmes are left in – or return to – communities who are unsupportive of the changes they are seeking to make. As a participant in the knowledge exchange workshop posited:

'I think often in these [NFE] spaces we can create a really [...] different kind of world in which there is equal participation, and the dynamics can be managed in a way that enables participation and leadership from young men and young women [and] from different minority groups that may not get that space within the wider society. However, I think we do need to bear in mind that the reality may be different outside the safe space that we create. So, I think it's important that we're examining those issues with young people and enabling them to navigate the actual reality of their lives. And I think [...] the safeguarding issues are really critical with that' (KE workshop participant)

The realities of community perceptions and life outside of programmes, therefore, need to be taken seriously, and understood by those running and facilitating programmes; not only to ensure their success and continuation, but also to ensure the safeguarding of young programme participants.

Participants in the project have also highlighted the scepticism that young people face from the communities in which they are trying to work. This can often be due to a scepticism about the role that young people can and should play in advocating for social change. Young participants in Bangladesh, for example, noted that they experienced scepticism from the local government offices that they needed to engage with to facilitate their social action projects. Community members themselves discussed the doubt and negative perceptions that some in the community held about young people. In Ethiopia, a small number of participants noted a general scepticism towards volunteering that existed in the communities they worked

in, with one participant noting that *'navigating this mindset poses a challenge to me as it sometimes discourages me from engaging in acts of goodwill, fearing they may perceived as foolish.'* (NFE0219E).

Finally, NFE programmes organised by large, or international, organisations can bring expectations of funding to a particular area. This is an issue that young participants noticed in Bangladesh, where community members assumed their association with the British Council meant the area would be receiving significant funding revenues. The young participants were left needing to reset these expectations.

Programmes therefore need to be embedded within wider communities, and work to create

change not just with young people, but in the communities that they are situated within; again, embedding within and contributing to ecologies of action for youth-led change. As discussed above, partnership work has the potential to be effective here, if programmes work with grass-level organisations and community leaders who can help to foster trust within the community. Knowledge exchange participants highlighted that engaging with local leaders, and getting their buy-in for programming, can be a significant step in getting buy-in from the wider community. This was echoed in findings from the feasibility studies and Myanmar study. In Myanmar, for example, it was found that working with religious organisations helped to maintain the accountability and transparency of programming, as well as helping to access

resources to enable programmes to function. The report notes that 'Strong community engagement, cultural sensitivity, and local ownership can enhance programme relevance, acceptance, and sustainability' (p.61). Young participants in Bangladesh also discussed using local government officials as gatekeepers in order to run their social action projects. Some participants mentioned that there were challenges in dealing with the bureaucratic processes here - noting for example that, 'Navigating the bureaucracy of government offices was challenging and often hindered our progress' (NFE0209B), and 'we faced a lot of red tape, which slowed down our project implementation' (NFE0210B). However, those who managed to foster positive relationships with the local government found this had a significant impact on their programming in terms of the provision of necessary permissions, endorsements that enhanced community engagement, and practical support. Young participants, for example, noted that *'The mayor's endorsement significantly boosted community participation'* (*NFE0203B*), and *'Getting the endorsement from the district council helped us a lot in gaining the community's trust'* (*NFE0205B*). Community members also recognised the impact that this government support – as well as community support - could have on youth-led change. As one community member stated, *"If you establish communication with the participants and they receive support from society and local government, they can contribute significantly to the development of our society."*

These findings all point to the need for programmes to be well embedded within the communities in which they operate, and programme teams to invest resources into this process, to increase the efficacy and sustainability of NFE programming and youth-led change, and to safeguard young

participants. As a young participant in Ethiopia very aptly stated: 'Volunteers need enabling environments to engage in different activities' (NFE0207E). This further demonstrates the importance of NFE programmes being embedded in 'ecologies of action', to enable effective programming and sustainable youth-led change developing through programmes.

5.6 Sustainability of programmes

This report has demonstrated the ways in which programmes can contribute to youth-led change, as well as the key continuing challenges faced across the three research sites and experienced by those who participated in the knowledge exchange workshops. This section will examine how sustainable the impacts of programmes are. It highlights that whilst programmes are doing effective work in enabling young people to see themselves as key social actors, and participate in social change whilst participating in programmes, this impact wanes substantially after a project's duration. It therefore points to persistent limitations in NFE empowering young people and enabling sustainable youth-led change, an issue that needs addressing by those working in the field.

In the feasibility studies, participants presented mixed feedback on whether it was possible for young people to continue to affect change, based on their engagement in the programme. Some young people highlighted the continued impact that their programmes had on the communities in which they worked. Participants in Bangladesh, for example, provided examples of social action projects initiated two years ago that continue to have positive impacts on society, including programmes to combat women's harassment on university campuses, and a waste management project, which,

although less robust than before, continues to operate. Across the two feasibility studies, other participants highlighted that the skills and attitudes they developed through the programme continue to impact their life since engaging with the programme, noting, for example, that the programme *'has affected the way I engage in my community positively. It has helped me develop my skills in interpersonal communication. It also helped me develop an interest and skill to reach for needy people in the community'* (*NFE0211*) and *'As a direct result of the program, I have been inspired to initiate positive changes within my community […] These actions may seem small, but they contribute to fostering a sense of compassion and solidarity within the community, reinforcing the principles of empathy and mutual support instilled during the program'.* (*NFE0219*). This viewpoint was echoed by some members of programme teams and facilitators, who noted that the knowledge and skills gained through the program could have a lasting effect on individuals. One facilitator noted, *'The program is finished but learning will always remain in their memory, and they will practice it'* (*NFE0304B*). Additionally, they highlighted the peacebuilding effects of the programme; with the change in young people's perceptions of 'others' as making steps towards positive and sustainable peace.

However, young participants also noted significant challenges in both maintaining the impacts of their social programmes, and applying the skills they had learnt in their daily lives, referring especially to the lack of an 'enabling environment' to continue the work of their programmes, and apply the skills and knowledge they had developed. In Bangladesh, for example, young people discussed the social action programme, described in section 5.2, designed to bridge gaps between local government and the community. Whilst this programme had positive impacts on society,

participants noted this was diminishing over time due to a lack of follow up monitoring and support of the activities since their participation in the programme finished.

In terms of the impact on young people themselves, the day-to-day pressures and challenges young people face make it difficult for them to apply their learning beyond the programme. The issues highlighted above of high youth unemployment and a lack of community support in particular contribute to this. Participants explained, for example, that *'I cannot boldly say that I am in a position to apply my learning in my day-to-day life, because I am deprived of finance and time. Additionally, I am not prepared enough to apply my learning from the pressure I face from the surrounding community.'* (*NFE0214E*). Another participant, when asked if they had been able to implement any changes in their community following the programme stated, *'I did not have an enabling environment to that end'* (*NFE0212E*).

Both young people and programme staff alike highlight the challenge of enabling the impact of these NFE programmes to last beyond the duration of the programme for two key reasons; firstly, young people receive either limited or no additional training, monitoring, or follow-up after completion of the programme (a persistent issue in donor-led development programming, as discussed above), and secondly there is this lack of enabling environment for young people to contribute to positive social change in their communities. These two elements feed into one another; as the impact of their environment makes it even harder for young people to enact change without this continued support or network.

As a member of the project team in Bangladesh explained:

> **'There are various obstacles they [young people] have to face when working for a cause and it's not like they can handle everything on their own. Coming from that, the spark I had seen in them, still see in them, they will do very well. They have the will to do well, but their spark and goodwill need our support. Without any support, they will do something good, and their spark stops. There are some extraordinary ones who somehow make it work but without continued support, they lose their sustainability as well [...] After closely observing them I noticed that the values definitely affected them. However, now that there's a gap [as the training has finished]. Because of this gap I feel that they have gone back to square one. There are hardly a few who are still carrying all the values this program gave them' (NFE0106B).**

Programme teams therefore were concerned about the ability of young people to continue to apply and develop the skills and knowledge they had gained through the programme without any ongoing support or network on which they could draw on. Participants across the board highlighted the need for more time to run programmes, as well as investment in enabling the continued monitoring and support of young people who had participated in the programmes, with mentoring and the development of networks in which young participants could support one another. Young participants, for example, highlighted that:

> **Concerned bodies should follows up volunteer youths after they finished their training and deployment or community engagements; otherwise,**

> **it is nonsense dispersing volunteer youths just after they finished their initial responsibility (NFE0215E).**

> **In my opinion, the role of the program should not only train youth volunteers and disperse them for free, but they also should follow them up to look whether they apply the skills and knowledge they grasp from the program in a positive way' (NFE0216E).**

> **They gave us initial guidance and ways to work, but then left us to carry out these tasks on our own. Although it is our own responsibility, in the Bangladeshi context, people do not always want to be accountable. Everyone wants profit. However, for people like us who are not seeking profit, if the British Council continued to follow up with guidance, we might be able to work and contribute more effectively (NFE0211B).**

These calls by young people for continued monitoring, as well as the challenges of constraining environments, are far from unique to the programmes studied in this research – these issues persist throughout programming with young people, and global development programming. However, the calls again bring attention to the need for programmes to be situated within, and affect, ecologies of action. Programmes need greater embedding in the communities with which they work, to enable support mechanisms for youth-led change to develop beyond the duration of the project. This includes ensuring buy-in from key stakeholders and community members, and improving the acceptability of youth-led initiatives, so that young people

aren't left discouraged by not only a lack of support, but active distrust of their initiatives. It also demonstrates the need for improved networks of young people, to support one another to facilitate change. The Myanmar report identified the importance of these networks of youth – or alumni networks – in providing monthly spaces in which programme alumni connect with one another and with programme facilitators to share success stories and tips, and monitor the progress of alumni.

Continued engagement and monitoring of participants, however, is of course easier said than done. Programmes themselves often find they are not in enabling environments for their work. The research in Myanmar highlights the stark realities faced by NFE initiatives which can be subject to warrantless investigations by the military government, sometimes leading to the imprisonment of programme facilitators, and where curfews, permit requirements and continued bombing campaigns make delivering programming incredibly difficult. These can at times bring programmes to a close to safeguard both facilitators and participants.

Remarkably, some NFE initiatives are able to run despite this unstable and constraining environment, but programming is necessarily significantly impacted. The above discussion on the short-termism of development funding is another key example of the constrained environments programmes face, as they can lack the flexibility to run longer-term programming or, sometimes, to embed young people in the design of programmes. This is, again, further complicated in countries facing conflict and instability; where donors often become wary of operating in precarious contexts, and high and fluctuating inflation rates in these contexts significantly affect budgets.

Both young people, and the programmes seeking to support them, are therefore missing these enabling environments. This again highlights the need for programmes, where possible, to seek to contribute to creating ecologies of action that support the development of such enabling environments; seeking to affect change not only with the participants with whom they work, but also the communities and societies in which they operate.

6. Summary

This report has brought together findings from research studies in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Myanmar and an international knowledge exchange workshop to understand how NFE can, and does, contribute to youth-led social change. Scholars have argued that NFE can have particular value because it has the potential to be flexible, adaptable, and enable different forms of learning than that which takes place in other educational settings, including providing spaces which enable young people to engage in their learning experientially and affectively (Johnson & Majewska 2022, Hodgkinson 2024, May Group forthcoming, Harvey, Cooke & BST 2020; Harvey, McCormick & Vanden 2019).

The research project from which this study follows – Changing the Story – found that these experiential and affective encounters enabled young people to better understand and express their place in society and make calls for – and progress towards – socially just change in their communities (The May Group forthcoming; Hodgkinson 2024; Cooke, Hodgkinson and Manning 2023). In Non-Formal Education for Youth-Led Change, by using participatory methodologies and creating opportunities for diverse groups to come together, NFE has been found to create spaces for this experiential and embodied learning. This learning has changed young people's perceptions of their societies – they have become more aware of the challenges experienced by different groups - and their perceptions of their role in society – now understanding themselves as leaders and people who can make change in their communities. It has also led them to understand the collective power of young people. NFE has therefore contributed to youth-led change by enabling young people to see themselves as individuals and as a collective, as key social actors who have a role to play in shaping their countries' and societies' future.

Despite this clearly positive impact NFE programmes are having on young people, there continue to be challenges faced across programmes, that limit the impact and sustainability of this change. These include the need to engage young people in the design of programmes, and therefore ensuring programmes are fully meeting the needs of young people; enabling the equitable participation of young women in the programme, who were observed as participating less actively even if there were high numbers engaged in programmes; facilitating connections with the community to enable young people to effectively and safely engage with community members; and effectively monitoring young people whilst they take part in the programme, and finally supporting them after the programmes duration. One of the key challenges NFE programmes face – which all of the above relates to – is making their work sustainable

and enabling young people to continue to contribute to social change after the duration of programmes. There are a wide range of causes behind these challenges, many of them structural and contextual; NFE programmes do not operate in a vacuum, and as such are necessarily impacted by the systems in which they operate. Such systems can be enabling; particularly when there is widespread stakeholder buy-in, including from community leaders who play a significant role in promoting the acceptability of NFE programmes, and of youth-led change more broadly. However, they can also be constraining; with funding practices, gender norms, community norms and values amongst the elements that play a role in constraining programme activities and make it difficult for young people to implement what they have learnt once a programme has finished.

This, then, highlights the importance of what young people referred to as 'enabling environments' that are supportive both of NFE programmes, and of young people seeking to make changes in their communities. Going

forward, it seems crucial that NFE programmes work to embed ecologies of action into their programming; continuing their work in empowering young people, and simultaneously working to create enabling environments for young people to enact social change.

7. Recommendations

The findings highlight the need for all NFE programmes to work to affect the (constraining) environment they work in and take steps towards creating enabling environments for youth-led change. This is not a simple task, but some initial steps that can be taken towards this end include:

- Ensuring programmes are well embedded within the contexts with which they work. Time should be spent on engaging community leaders and conducting community outreach to facilitate an enabling environment for the duration of the project, and working to maintain that after the project.

- New funding applications can be used to extend existing programmes; therefore, enabling programmes to learn from lessons of earlier iterations of projects, and providing young people with the continued support that they call for.

- Further research needs to be done to identify how programmes can work, in the longer term and within the structural constraints that they face, to embed processes towards structural change within their programmes. Research to identify areas of best practice here would be especially valuable.

Young people need to be engaged in the design of programmes, to ensure they meet the interests, desires, and needs of participants, and to improve youth buy-in into the projects.

- Donors must recognise this as an essential requirement of programming for youth, and embed such practices into funding to allow organisations the time needed to enable this participation.

Programmes need to embed greater and recurring monitoring processes, to ensure that all groups of young people:

- Are engaged in, and enjoying, the programme.

- Feel safe on the programme, with any safeguarding concerns addressed immediately.

- Are not struggling with resources and finances as a result of engaging with the programme.

- Are getting what they want and need from engaging with the programme.

- Have realistic expectations about what they will gain from the project at the outset.

Programmes need to ensure that all genders are genuinely able to participate in activities, and avoid programmes replicating, and therefore potentially reinforcing, gender norms and gender stereotypes. This can be facilitated by:

- Gender- and context- sensitive programming; assessing on a case-by-case basis what spaces different genders need in order to feel safe and participate, and planning activities accordingly.

- The above-mentioned increase in monitoring, to tackle issues with participation as and when they occur, preventing them from causing larger issues as the programme progresses.

Young participants across the programmes made calls for follow-up support and mentoring. Whilst recognising that limited funding affects the ability of programmes to do this, some steps for enabling this include:

- Building strong youth networks into programme design, so young people feel supported by one-another after the programme duration and facilitating communication between young people.

- Facilitating semi-regular meetups after a programme has finished, in which young people can network with one another, receive advice from programme facilitators, and feel motivated in continuing their efforts.

- Promoting wider stakeholder and community engagement; creating lasting networks of support and mentorship for young people.

Ensure meaningful safeguarding policies and processes are created and implemented for programmes, with clear actions in place for when participants feel and/or are unsafe.

- To mitigate against safeguarding challenges, ensure projects fully engage the communities in which young people will be working.

The participatory approaches that allowed for experiential and embodied learning through the projects were particularly meaningful and impactful. Future NFE programming should be based around these methodologies.

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