



14 AND 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

The Empower Youth for Work virtual symposium was the culmination of a 5.5-year programme, funded by the Ikea Foundation, that enabled young people, especially women, in rural climate-affected areas of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Ethiopia to seek and obtain respectable and sustainable work.

The symposium saw 418 participants logging in from over 25 countries. There were 90 speakers in all, their words and work relayed and interpreted in 6 languages, making the EYW symposium a vibrant global learning event.

WHAT MADE EYW UNIQUE

The program worked with the youth themselves as co-creators and implementers. This meant freedom and flexibility for ideas to thrive and activities to be unique to each country and local context.

The program incorporated Human-Centred Design (HCD) and a holistic approach that empowered youth with the requisite tools and building blocks to transform their lives. More importantly, as surveys showed, it helped them develop greater confidence and self-esteem.

WHY THE SYMPOSIUM WENT VIRTUAL

In 5.5 years, the programme notched up quite a few success stories. And some that struggled to be. All the stories, nevertheless, deserved to be shared with the world and the tremendous efforts of the participants acknowledged. However, with a pandemic that refused to let up, a virtual event it had to be.

Thus began a two-day gathering of the youth, country teams and local partners to discuss and review their experiences.

EVENT MILESTONES

GETTING OFF TO A FLYING START

The plenary sessions set the context for the symposium and captured the experiences and insights of the EYW co-creators, youth partners, and youth leaders. Participants and viewers joined Vasanthi Hariprakash, the host of the day, to flag off a warm and colourful inaugural.

[REWATCH THE EVENTS HERE](#)

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

On Day 1, the partners and youth decoded EYW's holistic approach and its three building blocks:

1. Youth agency & skills
2. Economic opportunities
3. Enabling environments

Youth partners of Oxfam Novib weighed in with research evidence on the project design, while youth leaders and partners offered perspectives on how this shaped up on the ground.



YOUTH PANEL DISCUSSIONS

On Day 2, panel discussions led by Faqih Aulia Akbar Rasyid and Bushra Ahmad explored youth-led activities in the 4 EYW countries.

Youth leaders gave a first-hand account of their experiences as innovators, ambassadors, entrepreneurs and influencers – and how they created positive personal, social, economic or environmental changes.



“At the core of EYW are the youth, youth experts and co-creators, making dreams happen. It was not an easy project to implement, but despite the many challenges – social, economic, natural disasters and political changes – what made it happen is the resilience and hard work of all involved.”

- Marieke Feitsma, EYW Project Leader, Oxfam Novib

INNOVATION BOOSTER

Innovation boosters by influencers and champions from the 4 EYW countries gave participants a glimpse of the groundbreaking work in rural employment in their respective countries.

Amir Hamza Xihad, Ary Suhandi, Shazia Batool, Petra Hans, Robbert van de Waerdt, and Rehima Abati held the audience spellbound as they spoke on areas as diverse as education, ecotourism, social and individual rights and entrepreneurship.





By Singers from the Addie OS Orchestra

CULTURAL BOOSTER

What's a get-together without some music, dance, and fun? Cultural boosters showcased the best of the regions.

From a contemporary choral take on a Sulawesi love song to a spirited Bangla dance amidst lush fields, from some arm-chair traveling across the breathtaking Hindu Kush mountains to a peppy, funky Somali dance and song routine, there was something for everyone!



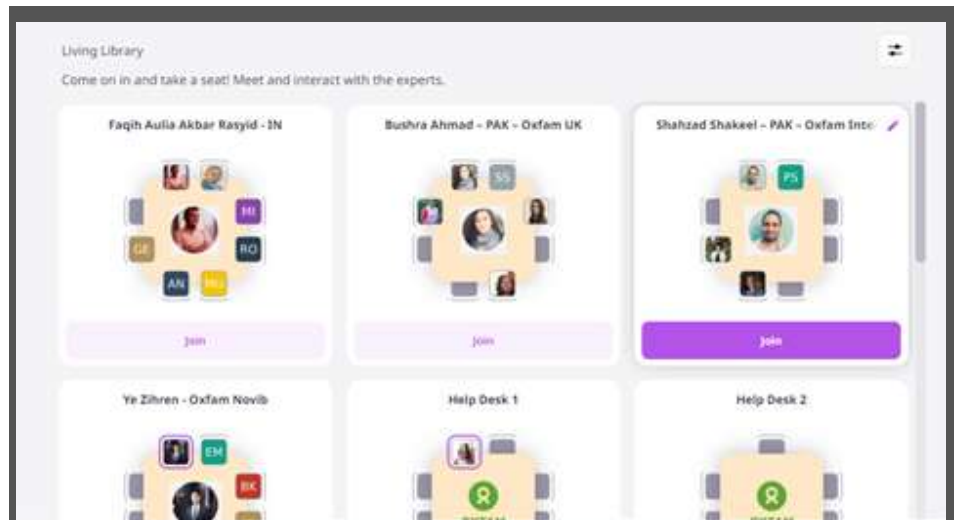
Source: Yaarta Dheere by Caali Dhaanto



By Youth of Bangladesh

LIVING LIBRARY

Coffee breaks at the symposium were one of a kind! Picture a living library, where participants could take a virtual seat at a table and converse with an expert of their choice. Lively interactions, Q&As, and casual pow-wows flowed, adding a special sparkle to the event.



PRODUCT SHOWCASE

Empowered social entrepreneurs from the 4 countries, trained under the EYW program, proudly presented their product offerings at the event.

A varied collection was showcased for the audience, ranging from jute handicrafts, traditional jewellery and fabrics from Bangladesh to pickles, soaps, and embroidered textiles from Pakistan, t-shirts, snacks and gifting items from Indonesia, and services from Ethiopia.



EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

In Indonesia, the initiative combined traditional tourism with modern strategies to create linkage to the rural market and increased economic opportunities for the youth and their communities. Co-created with young people, these sessions shared how this innovative business offers contemporary solutions to commercialize the tourism industry in an environmentally sustainable way.

YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) brought youth from several provinces together, supporting them as they advocated for youth issues in their region. The participants were involved in work relating to COVID-19, climate change and social norms. YABs have changed mindsets all around. Conversations with families, especially men, helped them see value in women's contribution to a household, and how their participation and leadership could benefit the family and community.



LOAN GUARANTEE PROGRAM

The Loan Guarantee Fund (LGF) gave the youth in Ethiopia access to financial services, education and funding, with a 360° approach. It not only facilitated loans and served as a guarantor for collaterals required by youth-centred enterprises, but also helped build financial and business literacy.

From creating a business development plan and assessing viability to navigating the legalities of registering a business, young entrepreneurs got a one-of-a-kind education and vital support to chase their dreams.

TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

RURAL HUBS IN BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN

Rural Hubs were safe spaces set up by the youth for their peers, especially women, to learn, share ideas and do business. Participants developed business ideas, cultivated connections to the market, and learned to digitise their businesses.

"Money ++ services" was a unique selling point of the hubs, the ++ pointing to the broader opportunity to develop communication skills, relationships, confidence, etc. In one case, the hub enabled a woman participant with a disability to not only earn for herself but also become more articulate.



YAB is a tool to engage with policy-making, putting youth at the forefront."

- Nimra Nazir, Project Officer, Oxfam Pakistan

CLIMATE SMART VILLAGE

Climate change and its impact were discussed within community groups, roping in women, youth, as well as local businesses and entrepreneurs. Local solutions, sustainable practices and business proposals were explored. Vermicomposting as a source of additional income for women has been a successful contribution. During the pandemic, the focus moved from community tourism to local food, with new products like tilapia fish and organic food introduced into the communities and market.

SUCCESS STORY



Roda Abdiwali Isaq is a 25-year-old member of an entrepreneurship scheme who is no longer financially dependent on her family. She is part of a cooperative that is engaged in selling household utensils with the support of the EYW program.

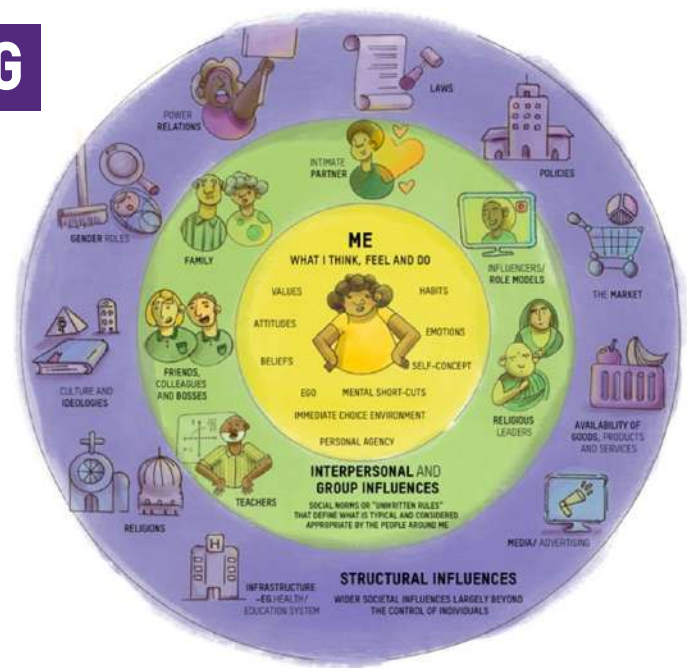
BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

SOCIAL NORMS

In 2017, Oxfam started a learning trajectory to understand and diagnose social norms and design effective strategies to gradually uproot regressive notions and nurture empowerment within youth. Ronald van Moorten and Aissa Boodhoo explored the what, why, how and the way ahead for the social norms journey.

Question: "When have you done something because you felt socially motivated to do so, even if you didn't want to or think it wasn't right?"

Responses: "Opening an Instagram account", "Going to family gatherings", "Pretending to pray at a dinner table", "Wearing a veil in a meeting because there were boys present (even though they were half my age)"



THIS GRAPHIC WAS PRODUCED BASED ON INPUT FROM JUAN CARLOS ARIZA, JAMARU BIZI, RUTH MAYNE AND THOMAS DANWINE ROODWIGZ

GENDER ACTION LEARNING SYSTEM

GALS uses visual diagramming tools, principles and peer learning mechanisms that enable marginalized people to develop their own visions of where they want to go.

GALS in EYW has:

- Strengthened the agency of youth
- Changed gender power relations
- Made gender discrimination, violence against women and socio-political exclusion of women unacceptable
- Changed deep-rooted social norms and behaviour



Some aspects are different [in terms of youth vision in the global south vs north] but they also have similarities. For example, in rural and poor areas where girls are pushed to marry early and see it as a strategy for her to escape from her situation, their vision is to get married to a good man."

- Intan Darmavati, GALS Facilitator

ENCOURAGING FEMALE-LED BUSINESSES


Young women entrepreneurs shared their journey of setting up entrepreneurial ventures. Implementing and local partners Asspuk and IBL helped the youth by offering soft skills boot camps and business development support. They also prepared them for e-commerce business and employment opportunities.



DUAL APPRENTICESHIP


The Dual Apprenticeship Model (DAM) piloted in Bangladesh included training in the workplaces. This meant youth developed the confidence to succeed in the job market. In Ethiopia, youth apprenticeship schemes focused on women-friendly sectors & linkages with the government and private sector companies. To foster entrepreneurship, a vehicle equipped with trainers and tools including mobile Wi-Fi hotspots visited remote rural areas of Ethiopia.

GREAT PEOPLE SAYING AWESOME THINGS




"We have the opportunity which the youth of the past centuries did not have, we must take the opportunity to make use of it!"

- Ismael Ibrahim (Ethiopia)




"Thank you very much for the wonderful learning event –well organized, very colourful and lots of learning."

- Rahel Bekele (Ethiopia)



"A big big big shout out to everyone for a successful event. It was so nice to see all the familiar and new faces who made it happen. It was a tremendous pleasure to be a part of this event."


- Jolly Nur Haque (Bangladesh)



"I am writing to share our appreciation to the whole Oxfam and Pickle Jar team for all their hard work in organizing such an amazing symposium. It was so inspiring to see and experience all the wonderful work happening in four countries via a virtual platform. I was talking to one of our youth leaders yesterday and it was a life-changing experience for him. He participated in any virtual event for the very first time and presented his story too. He was so happy and proud of himself that he was finding it difficult to express his experience in words. That was a moment of joy for me too that EYW has extended this experience to our rural young people and it will stay with them for their lifetime.

Thanks again for all your efforts in making this happen with so much realism."

- Seher Afsheen (Pakistan)



"Thank you for the collaboration and your support ... I really enjoyed the experience and the vibe.... Hopefully, our network can be strengthened and we can meet again at another time. If I can say so in Bahasa, Sampai Jumpa [Good bye till we meet again]."

- Anon (Indonesia)

BEHIND THE SCENES: WHAT IT TOOK

You've had a glimpse of the milestones, highlights and stories of the EYW community as we wrapped up a 5.5-year programme. We now leave you with a note from team Pickle Jar, who curated the event and had a unique insider's view. We hope you enjoy this sneak peek as they recount what happened behind the scenes!

"Around June 2021, we stepped in as the event collaborator for the EYW virtual symposium. While I had worked with Carin Boersma earlier to anchor an Oxfam Novib programme in 2016, this project was different from the word go.

The scale of the EYW event itself was mind-blowing – it involved interacting with young people and project leads from 4 countries, vastly different in their ethnicity, culture and geography. It also required us as a curating team to understand the intensive work they had packed into the past five years – amidst so many challenges, and then help tell that story to the world. All, virtually.

Week after week, as Carin Boersma and Gwendolyn Parami of Oxfam meticulously set up meetings with country teams, names on emails started to become faces; faces became familiar; the formal greetings became warm exchanges. If a person was missing in a subsequent meeting, there was concern, given how the pandemic was still not letting up in so many places.

When people in remote Ethiopia or Indonesia had trouble logging in to a team meeting, it drove home the challenge of connectivity and bandwidth. And then the complexities of navigating different languages and dialects – as organisers, we had to ensure everyone understood everyone else in the final symposium and nothing was lost in translation!

Dry runs on the tech platform, rehearsals with the translation software, moments when participants beat all odds to turn up for the prep sessions, the giggles and shy smiles when speakers would turn their camera "on" for that "group picture", the quiet concentration as they geared up to say their piece, the sudden drop-offs, the eager, almost triumphant re-joins... We shall cherish all of these, even as we marvel that such a cross-continental effort could be powered from a live studio in Bangalore, India!

The fact that human bonds can be forged across time, distance, and languages despite a killer virus is a beautiful lesson in hope that we will all take away. Besides the many screenshots of the event itself!"

In gratitude,

Vasanthi Hariprakash, on behalf of team Pickle Jar





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This report was developed by Pickle Jar
www.picklejar.co.in

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