



Building Bridges for Peace Through Active Citizenship

For one and a half billion people worldwide, conflict and instability are a daily reality. By 2030, it is estimated that more than half of the world's extreme poor will reside in fragile regions¹. VSO is working to ensure that our programming is peace and conflict-sensitive, addressing the complex dynamics of communities in these contexts. Our programmes in conflict-affected contexts are powerful enablers in building peace through carefully selected interventions that strengthen social cohesion, foster resilience and stability and empower communities.

Fostering Peace in Ethiopia-Kenya Border Communities

In the border region of Ethiopia and Kenya, persistent drought and famine, ethnicity politics, and disregard for indigenous systems frequently leads to armed conflict and community violence. Recognizing the importance of stability and resilience as the foundation for sustainable development, the Integrating Peace Development Humanitarian Efforts (IPDHE) project is fostering peace and cooperation among cross-border communities in the region. The project, funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation, empowers community volunteers as active citizens in local communities to identify the root causes of conflict and collaboratively develop solutions.

Since 2022, volunteers representing a total of 21 cross-border communities have been trained and empowered to develop community led action plans and strategies for building resilience and peace in their communities and to lead the implementation of these plans. These peace champions have effectively

157,000

people supported in the Ethiopia-Kenya border



promoted dialogue, mediation, and conflict resolution, particularly focusing on the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups alongside actions to reduce the impact of climate change and improve disaster preparedness. This contributes to reducing conflict in the region where inter-community violence centres on access to scarce resources – water, grazing land – when there is a severe drought.

These volunteers have also supported local peace and disaster risk reduction committees and set up cross border peace committees with local leaders to prevent and mitigate conflicts, and have organized trainings, community events and cultural exchanges. Their efforts have cultivated a shared responsibility for community

1. World Bank



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From Adversity to Advocacy: a Peace Champion in Kenya

Ibrahim is a VSO community volunteer and a father of six from Kenya. Despite having lost his leg due to a bandit attack on his village, he remains a pillar of strength and hope. His community experiences many issues including drought and high poverty levels, which often prevent families from being able to afford school fees for their children. In the face of these hardships, Ibrahim is dedicated to making a difference. As a VSO volunteer, he delivers peace training, helping foster a more harmonious and resilient community.

well-being, which can have a long-lasting positive impact on community dynamics and relationships, and have strengthened the systems responsible for peace and crisis management.

Through the Active Citizenship for Inclusive Volunteering and Empowerment programme, funded by UK International Development, a livelihoods technical expert worked with IPDHE volunteers in Ethiopia in promoting sustainable livelihoods, supporting communities to adapt to environmental challenges. By building community capacity and providing drought resistant plants, these volunteers have created more sustainable food supplies in the region. This not only reduces stress and tension in the area but also reduces dependency on livestock, fostering long-term resilience to environmental challenges while reducing conflict and tensions. Livelihood diversification programs and training on climate-smart agriculture have ensured the communities are now better equipped to withstand crises.

The collaborative efforts and dedication of all stakeholders are addressing both the immediate needs of these communities, and the underlying causes of conflict. This approach to peacebuilding not only lays the foundation for long-term development and stability, but also nurtures a more inclusive, peaceful and resilient society.

Conflict-Sensitive Education in Conflict-Affected Myanmar

Children in Myanmar are enduring a severe a humanitarian crisis due to the military coup in 2021 and

subsequent escalating conflict. The displacement of millions has led to severe pressures on the education system, leaving many children throughout the country out of school. In Mon state, southern Myanmar, an increasing number of children are dropping out of school due to safety concerns, political unrest and economic instability.

In response, the ACTIVE project is working in the area to improve and increase access to quality education for around 2,800 children. The project has provided safe learning spaces and trained educators, local civil society organisations, and youth volunteers in essential skills and knowledge, including conflict sensitivity, leadership, inclusive education approaches, climate change, and waste management. As a result, educators are now better equipped to deliver basic education to vulnerable children.

Adopting a conflict sensitivity approach, the project ensures active participation and a thorough understanding of Myanmar's risks and context to prevent harm and foster social change. Teachers and

I learned that conflict sensitivity is important. Sometimes what we do is meant to be good, but when we do not know about conflict sensitivity, we unintentionally encourage conflict to grow.”

Community volunteer in Myanmar

partners analyse conflict sensitivities and develop risk mitigation plans through mappings, discussions and workshops. Collaboratively with the community, they deepen their understanding of causes and impacts of conflict, enhancing the protection of learners, teachers and learning environments.

The project targets out of school children, including those with disabilities and children who have missed years of schooling or have never attended school. Many of these children have experienced severe trauma as a consequence of the conflict and continue to be affected by it. Teachers safeguard learners through disaster risk and resilience lesson planning and provide spaces for children to express their emotions, learn safety strategies and find calm, fostering a sense of wellbeing and inclusion. Consistent rules, routines and visual timetables also contribute to children's sense of belonging and safety.

Peacebuilding Through Agro-Ecotourism in the Philippines

After six decades of conflict between armed groups and government forces, Mindanao, one of the Philippines' most southerly islands, is slowly recovering. Whilst a peace deal was struck in 2014, that peace is still fragile. The Philippines is prone to typhoons, exacerbated by climate change and there is an ongoing concern that devastating economic and ecological consequences of extreme weather could exacerbate existing ethnic hostilities.

"I hope that, even if we come from different religions, we always choose peace over conflict."

Noridjah, Muslim VSO community volunteer in the Philippines

The ACTIVE project is making a significant impact in the area, building bridges among different communities by integrating agroecology and peacebuilding. By focusing on reintegrating ex-combatants and their families into the community, the livelihood support offers them an income and a stable life, thereby reducing the chances of them returning to active conflict.

Enriching local knowledge and empowering these individuals to lead their own development further contributes to the sustainability of the initiative. The project has supported the creation of social enterprises,

such as rice retailing and bio-fertilizer production, and agroecology projects such as family gardens, opening up new income opportunities for the community, particularly women and youth.



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Fostering Unity in a Once-Divided Community

Eleanor is a Christian. Noridjah is a devout Muslim and VSO community volunteer who has lived in her town in Mindanao, the country's southernmost island, for 50 years. Historically, there has been tension between the two religious groups with communities in Mindanao, embroiled in six decades of conflict. Today, they are friends, after meeting in peacebuilding workshops developed locally and delivered by VSO volunteers, enabling communities to come together for the greater good.

"We're all people and have the same feelings, so it's important that you respect each religion's feelings. We were also educated on how to be friends with people of other faiths and how to work together. This enabled us to have an open mind," says Noridjah. "The friendship that I have with Noridjah is a great example to other community members that Muslims and Christians can be friends and live peacefully together," adds Eleanor.



44

**community-based organisations
trained in Mindanao, the Philippines**



14,800

**people impacted through the project
in Mindanao, the Philippines**

January-March 2024

One of the project's achievements is the transformation of a former rebel camp into an ecotourism destination. The initiative is a shining example of communal harmony, involving a diverse community working together from the construction phase to the maintenance of boardwalks, which include an elevated community garden. Peace Huts also provide spaces for different groups to come together to dialogue and socialize, building trusted relationships. Through a collaborative effort, volunteers and community members discovered the immense potential of ecotourism and sustainable practices to protect marshlands and generate income from natural resources whilst strengthening social cohesion.

These efforts have made significant strides in promoting social cohesion and accountability. One of the most notable outcomes is the empowerment of women and youth, who now recognise their ability to transform their lives and engage local leaders to address their needs. In addition, the project is fostering unity among Muslim and Christian community members, who are working together in the conservation of marine resources, cultivating a sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

Inclusion Among Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda

The Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Uganda, the world's second largest refugee camp, is home to over 270,000 people. Out of these, 60% are children aged 3-17 years old, a number that has doubled since 2016. The settlement faces significant challenges due to

prolonged droughts and floods, creating a sensitive environment prone to tensions between host and refugee communities.

Through the ACTIVE project, VSO is working on Early Childhood Care and Education, bringing communities together to ensure social inclusion in education, leaving no child behind. The project engages parents, caregivers, teachers, schools, community leaders and governments to improve children's access to inclusive, quality, and equitable early childhood care and education.

At the community level, the project has facilitated dialogues on peaceful co-existence and social cohesion, supporting school leadership in developing and implementing inclusive practices. Parents have received guidance on positive parenting and have been invited to and join parent support groups, focused on improving their families' livelihoods and nutrition. By working closely with the Ministry of Education and local governments, the project has mediated conflicts between refugee and host communities and conducted awareness campaigns promoting peaceful coexistence.

4,500

**learners enrolled in
the ECCE-ACTIVE
programme in Uganda**

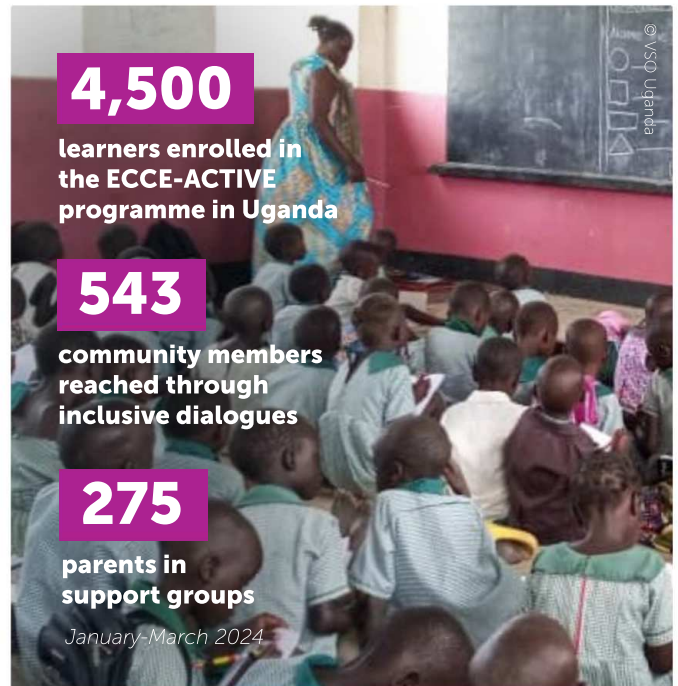
543

**community members
reached through
inclusive dialogues**

275

**parents in
support groups**

January-March 2024



About ACTIVE

The ACTIVE programme is a multi-year grant from the UK government, worth £27m, running from April 2022. The programme supports the development of active citizenship across the Global South, so marginalised people are able to lead their own development, claim their rights to better public services and hold people in power to account.



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