Welcome

Since 2011, a total of 40,167 young people volunteered in 32 countries across the world as a part of International Citizen Service (ICS). They have made positive changes in the communities where they have volunteered, developed skills and personal resilience to face an ever-changing world and started a lifelong journey of active citizenship.

This year has been an unprecedented one for us all. The COVID-19 pandemic meant we had to bring home all volunteers who were on ICS placements across Asia and Africa. This was the largest repatriation process ever undertaken by ICS agencies.

We have always said that bringing young people from all walks of life together to volunteer brings about positive changes beyond the 12-week placement itself. This has been truer than ever during the pandemic response, with former and current ICS volunteers supporting the vulnerable in the UK and across ICS countries, for example, supporting home schooling in Nepal and raising awareness of COVID prevention measures in rural communities in Kenya, Tanzania and Cambodia.

The contract for ICS, delivered by VSO in partnership with Restless Development and Raleigh International, came to its planned end in December 2020. Conversations are ongoing in the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) about what a new phase of the scheme might look like and how it can operate safely in a post-COVID world.

The last ten years of International Citizen Service has demonstrated the positive impact and undeniable power of youth volunteering. From addressing disability rights in Kenya to tackling child marriage in Bangladesh, young people have contributed to real, sustainable change. This report celebrates the passion, dedication and achievements of our volunteers and staff.

Felicity Morgan
Director, ICS
Introduction

International Citizen Service (ICS) brought together young people from the UK to volunteer side-by-side with young people from developing countries in some of the poorest communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

It recruited volunteers from different and diverse backgrounds to encourage sharing of ideas and perspectives. This approach was seen to drive innovation and collaboration on development projects aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and ending poverty.

ICS was funded by the UK government and led by VSO, in partnership with leading development agencies, Restless Development and Raleigh International. Since its inception in 2011, a total of 40,167 young people volunteered in 32 countries. 20,964 of these individuals were from the UK and 19,203 from the developing world.

In recent years, we have run ICS projects in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kenya, Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Our projects focus on health, education, livelihoods, social accountability and environment.

However, the impact doesn’t stop there. Throughout the last ten years, ICS has also supported communities in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tajikistan, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

ICS partners

International Citizen Service Impact

40,167
volunteers

19,203
in-country volunteers

20,964
UK volunteers

32
countries

Projects in

Health
Education
Livelihoods
Social Accountability
Environment

25%

37%

14%

6%

19%
International Citizen Service gave its volunteers a once-in-a-lifetime experience that pushed them out of their comfort zones to learn and participate in community development.

It brought together diverse teams of young people to volunteer on projects aimed at ending poverty in some of the world’s poorest communities. Teams were made up of volunteers aged 18-25, from both the UK and the host country, and were supported by team leaders, who are aged up to 35.

How ICS works

All volunteer placements contributed to:

- Poverty reduction and sustainable development
- Personal and social development of each volunteer

They also empowered young people to act as agents of change within their own communities and beyond and created a legacy of active citizenship.

ICS projects contributed to long-term development impact, with volunteers working across a wide range of projects, including livelihoods, health (including sexual and reproductive health), education, and

When lockdown began in the UK in March 2020, Molly, 22, immediately started thinking about the impact on the most vulnerable people in her community. Inspired by her experience with ICS she set out to do what she could to help as a volunteer during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Molly set up a food delivery service Molly’s Meals to support those most vulnerable during the coronavirus pandemic.

Molly says it was her placement on a youth employment project on Zanzibar, Tanzania, in October 2019 that gave her the skills to help in her own community in Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

“My time in Zanzibar was easily the most fulfilling period of my life. The sense of community to the students’ positive commitment to the project, made the whole placement a positive experience.”

“I started Molly’s Meals, providing a fresh hot meal to vulnerable individuals each day. I’ve received fresh fruit and veg from restaurants in my town that have had to close, and local businesses have also been donating food. I’m going to keep going until the virus is safely gone.”

Molly received a UK Points of Light award from the UK government for her contributions during the coronavirus pandemic.
environment. A strong focus on social accountability ran through the projects, strengthening the voice of communities and empowering marginalised groups, including disabled people, to access their rights.

Volunteers also embarked on a personal development journey, supported at all stages of the programme to develop new and transferable skills such as cross-cultural working, teamwork and leadership. All volunteers engaged in ongoing training and learning, starting with a residential pre-placement training and continuing through to their post-placement debrief.

The UK government funded 90 percent of the ICS programme, with the other 10 percent coming from money raised by UK volunteers. This was the first opportunity for volunteers to learn new skills, grow in confidence and demonstrate their commitment to active citizenship.

During their 12-week placement, volunteers gained crucial experience in resilience, adaptability and confidence which was seen to prepare them for the world of work and further study, as well as deepening their understanding of poverty and global development.

Following their placement, ICS volunteers were required to complete at least one social action as part of their Action at Home – a project in their home community on a social issue of their choosing. Along with the experiences from their placement, this final phase of the programme aimed to help volunteers channel their passion and enthusiasm as advocates for change. Many of our alumni continue to be lifelong active citizens.

Abel and Tom met while volunteering with ICS Restless Development in 2019. They went on to co-found Equal Aqua Uganda (EAU) after being inspired by their ICS project during their placement.

Abel explains, “A billion people worldwide still don’t have access to safe drinking water. In Uganda, over half of the country’s 42 million people struggle to access this basic human need. Through EAU, we hope to enhance the capability of communities to access water and sanitation facilities.”

The project began just 3 months before Uganda’s first confirmed coronavirus case – and the NGO has been busy responding to Covid-19.

Abel continues: “We started with small deeds to address short-term needs. For instance, we have been installing handwashing centres with soap in communities and helped distribute over 300 face masks to vulnerable communities.

“Through Facebook, we have also conducted training to help build the capacity of other young people to make liquid soap to ensure personal safety, but also to sell to earn a living.”

EAU is also building eco-friendly water-tanks.

“The water-tank model that we are promoting uses discarded plastic water bottles as bricks. It’s a low-cost and carbon-saving alternative to baked bricks.”

Abel Odeke was also awarded a Points of Light Award from the UK government for his work on this project.
But not all volunteer projects help to make the world a fairer place. Whilst many volunteering initiatives provide a valuable contribution to local communities, there are forms of volunteering that can be more harmful than beneficial.

An example of this is the trend for combining overseas travel with a volunteer placement in an orphanage. 80 percent of the children in orphanages are not true orphans. They could (and should) be reunited with their families. In places such as Cambodia, the number of orphanages has been growing, not due to a rise in abandoned children, but from a rise of tourists paying to work with them.

We want young people to make informed choices about the type of work they choose to undertake as a volunteer overseas. VSO launched the ‘Global Standard for Volunteering in Development’ on behalf of the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) at the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations’ Conference (IVCO) 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda on 28 October 2019. We also developed the below checklist with to inform young people’s decision-making.

**Responsible Volunteering Checklist**

*Here are some key questions to keep in mind before choosing an organisation to volunteer with.*

Does the organisation:

- Work with local partners?
- Provide training before you go?
- Provide support through experienced local staff?
- Provide medical insurance?
- Ask you to fundraise? If so – where does the money go?
- Explain the value of using international volunteers?
- Have a long-term plan for the communities they support?
- Conduct safeguarding checks for volunteers who work with children?
- Offer you the opportunity to talk to volunteers who have been on placement?
Inclusion

We know people from diverse backgrounds can both contribute and gain so much from volunteering, but for many this is an opportunity that has multiple barriers. ICS developed practices to remove these barriers for participation, to ensure that every young person, no matter their identity, had the opportunity to realise their potential and support our work to tackle poverty and marginalisation.

Our efforts to ensure inclusion for all have paid off. We reached young people across all demographics and met all our diversity targets. For example, 30 percent of ICS applications were from BAME backgrounds, and 37 percent met two or more indicators relating to socio-economic diversity, such as having accessed free school meals, or living in a household with an income of less than £20,000 per year.

Marketing and recruitment materials were developed to reach and appeal to different target groups, including sign language recruitment videos for Deaf candidates. An Access Fund also provided additional support for volunteers and provided adjustments to allow volunteers to participate. Adjustments have included purchasing specialist laptop equipment or software to support volunteers with visual impairments and the shipping of necessary medical equipment.

Since 2016, we have supported 170 UK volunteers with different types of disability to participate on ICS, and many more disabled volunteers from ICS host countries have participated on the programme. Disabled people have unique knowledge and an experience of disability, and their voices have been particularly powerful in programmes designed to challenge disability stigma and champion disability rights.

Our work on inclusion resulted in ICS winning BOND’s Diversity Award in 2020. This award recognises organisations in the UK NGO sector that nurture diverse and inclusive workforces.

Izak Lees

“My childhood, if I’m brutally honest, was rough. When I was 9, I was moved to three different schools in the space of one year, so I was always the new kid arriving halfway through the term. I do have happy memories, but mostly I remember the constant bullying. I ended up being not a very nice person myself. As a teenager, my mentality was quite vicious. I took a lot of drugs and I got in trouble with the police for street fighting.

The three months I was in Tanzania felt like a lifetime. At the end, I was given the Most Dedicated Volunteer award. I’d thrown myself into the work so completely, I felt I’d given it everything. When I got home, I was stronger and more confident. I work on a fishing boat now and I have a great reputation.”

© VSO/Andrew Aitchison
Khamis Mohamed is a 19-year-old electrician in the coastal town of Mtwara. He was raised by his mother after his father left, having been unable to accept a child with albinism as his son. School was difficult, with Khamis experiencing discrimination and teasing from fellow students and teachers alike.

ICS together with the National Youth Engagement Network (NYEN) carried out COVID-19 awareness raising in Mtwara in 2020. Khamis was one of 20 youth representatives selected to carry out this programme. He educated children in primary and secondary schools on Covid risks and provided training on how to make liquid soap easily and affordably. He is now carrying out environmental projects, such as creating tree nurseries to provide trees for planting.

“I would like to tell the community leaders that [having a disability] doesn’t mean we can’t do anything. We can. If there are people who are discriminating against people with albinism, that’s not right at all. At first, I was not confident. I felt no-one would listen to my ideas because of stereotypes. Now I can stand in front of people and talk without any doubt. We are the product of ICS and now we are active citizens.”

On arrival in Kenya… I was excited to meet my Kenyan host home counterpart, Barbara… Barbs was like a sister to me; she was one of a kind and the best. The whole ICS team were the best. ICS volunteering was such a great event in my life. It has helped me become more self-aware of my strengths and weaknesses, which will help me as I build on my career and it has been a great opportunity to give back to the society.”

Overcoming prejudice in Tanzania

Temitope Agbi

“My journey started in my living room in the UK, scrolling through my Instagram page and seeing ICS pop-ups… I felt I may not have been qualified… I thought to myself… You have a lot of responsibility right here, will you leave it to pursue volunteering in a country you know nothing about with people you do not know? They may be all white and you’re a black Nigerian!
There are almost 190,000 Deaf people registered in Kenya, but there is a huge stigma attached to the condition. An ICS project in Nandi, Kenya, brought together a group of volunteers from the UK with Deaf local volunteers to establish free sign language sessions and support classes for Deaf children and their parents.

The project was a huge eye opener for many of the British volunteers, many of whom regard British Sign Language as their mother tongue. One primary aged boy, Victor, had never been taught sign language, and had no way of communicating at all. The ICS volunteers were the first people to teach him sign language, enabling him to express himself for the first time in his life.

The ICS volunteers taught 450 volunteers sign language, including families and classmates of Deaf children. The volunteers also helped address some of the stigma around deafness by organising a Deaf awareness march. Many people were surprised by the variety of careers practised by the British Deaf volunteers, and realised that with the right support, Deaf children can learn as well as the hearing community.

One of the Kenyan volunteers was Enock, 23, who faced challenges after becoming Deaf in 2005: “Since becoming Deaf, I’ve had many challenges. My parents thought I was under a curse and thought I would never be successful in life.”

Raabia, 25, is Enock’s UK counterpart on the project in Nandi. Despite coming from very different backgrounds, she can relate to some of the challenges faced by Enock in Kenya.

She says: “As a Deaf child I thought it was quite difficult growing up, I faced many barriers and it’s expected that we’re stupid and won’t achieve anything. This experience has been life-changing. I’ve learnt so many things and it’s brilliant to have both UK and Kenyans in the team, learning each other’s cultures. It’s so important to use young volunteers because it can have an impact on our learning and we can pass it onto people back in the UK.”
The International Citizen Service has created positive change in the communities our volunteers work with. Some 92 percent of project partners say they are better able to bring out change as a result of working with young ICS volunteers. Volunteers have worked on education, healthcare, livelihoods and social accountability projects. Our projects are successful because they have strong relationships and communities at their heart.

Health projects focused on improving access and awareness of health rights and services and promoting healthy practices among communities.

ICS volunteers have highlighted the importance of good sanitation and hygiene practices, and raised awareness of young people’s sexual health rights and services.

Education projects aimed to improve access to education among disadvantaged groups in rural communities.

ICS volunteers have supported the retention of school-aged children through extracurricular activities, and raised awareness of the rights of education access for children with disabilities.

Livelihoods projects aimed to increase the economic opportunities and self-sufficiency of communities, particularly disadvantaged groups.

ICS volunteers have facilitated the skills development of women and youth enabling them to set up small businesses, and supported young people in accessing employment opportunities.

Social accountability projects amplified the voices of marginalised groups in society and built awareness of people’s rights and their capacity to exercise control over decisions and resources.

ICS volunteers have raised awareness of the rights of people living with disabilities, and energized community participation in local decision making.

Development impact

90 health projects have been carried out in 18 countries.

78 education projects have taken place in 17 countries.

172 livelihood projects have taken place in 26 countries.

55 social accountability projects have been carried out in 9 countries.
ICS volunteers live in the local community, staying in host homes and working closely with community members. The pairing of national and international volunteers within host homes enables strong team bonds between volunteers from different backgrounds; intercultural learning between volunteers and host homes; and a way for volunteers to build relationships with the wider community their host home is embedded in.

Our Dimensions of Change capture how ICS delivered sustainable development outcomes. These dimensions were found to be essential for building and sustaining meaningful relationships between volunteer and community, with the following areas noted as being the most effective:

- **Participation and participatory practices** – ICS volunteers promote the participation of community members by encouraging and modelling behaviour and approaches that place people at the heart of development.

- **Collaboration and networking** – ICS volunteers promote and enable collaboration across the community and local organisations which increase community cohesion and networks.

- **Community ownership and agency** – ICS volunteers strengthen local ownership and agency of people to take control of community development approaches.

- **Innovation and inspiration** – ICS volunteers inspire new ways of thinking that encourage innovative and creative new approaches and combine the best of ‘outside’ expertise with ‘inside’ knowledge.

- **Inclusion** – ICS volunteers work alongside disabled people, women and girls, and local youth to help build inclusive societies, often acting as role models, demonstrating the power of diverse perspectives and experiences in supporting sustainable development.

### Preventing Child Marriage in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, ICS volunteers have been working with the local communities to establish youth clubs and child marriage prevention committees.

Shapla, a 14 year old girl described how attending the youth club helped her convince her father to halt her early marriage to a 37-year old man:

“I attended some sessions out of curiosity. When it matched with my own life, I realised I have learnt a lot. The youth club members helped me in convincing my parents. I am so happy now I am going to school and continuing my study.”

Volunteers have also helped to secure registration for the clubs, ensuring that their work can be continued after the ICS volunteers leave the community.
Raleigh Tanzania ICS volunteers have constructed sanitation facilities in over 38 schools in the regions of Morogoro and Dodoma. They have also set up school clubs to maintain the facilities and champion effective hygiene practices. Some 95 percent of community members reached by the work said they had noticed an increased understanding of positive health and hygiene practices. Action days helped to promote discussions on water safety, how to treat water and how to reduce illnesses. These discussions have encouraged business owners to sell more cleanliness products like soap, sanitary pads and water purifiers.

Elijah, a teacher at Sululu Primary School, said: “I believe the education provided to us will help this generation and the next one, Sululu primary school and villages will always be grateful and cherish the moment we have shared and put into practice what you have taught us.”
ICS Community Volunteers supported by Restless Development’s partner organisation Urjaa, have been working closely with Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) to raise awareness about Covid-19, and specifically, mental health issues during the pandemic. The volunteers organised self-help groups for the FCHVs so that they could provide peer support to each other – as well as mental health training which was delivered by external technical experts. After the training, FCHVs were able to recognise different mental health issues, counsel patients to seek professional mental health support, and refer to mental health services, as well as being a support system to those who needed it.

Geeta Pudasani a FCHV from Devichour said: “Earlier, I tried to conduct mental health sessions during group meetings but I wasn’t good at it and felt very uncomfortable. But now I feel confident and capable. All the credit for this change goes to the training that I received where we had an opportunity to learn about identifying cases of mental illness.”

VSO’s flagship girls’ education project ‘Sisters for Sisters’ has integrated ICS volunteers into its activities. For example, confidence building is a key pillar of the project, and ICS volunteers have been crucial in the setting up of extracurricular clubs to help girls master English and digital skills, which can help their employment prospects once leaving education. ICS volunteers have also worked with schools to establish menstrual hygiene rooms and sanitary pad making sessions to support efforts to keep girls in education during their periods.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, ICS community volunteers have supported home learning by promoting the Home Study Manual and accompanying TV lessons produced by the Nepalese government. They have visited the homes of parents (observing social distancing, in pairs and holding the conversations in outdoor courtyard spaces of homes) to explain the manual and TV classes.
It is not just a benefit to volunteers, who often rate living in a host home as one of their favourite parts of placement. Host families too loved giving ICS volunteers a temporary home and experienced many positive benefits. These included increases in knowledge and awareness, improvements in English and, in a couple of instances, improvements in income levels. In Nandi, increases in knowledge and awareness were centred around increased knowledge of Kenyan Sign Language, which host families reported using to communicate with Deaf members of the community.

ICS is about building long-term relationships across borders and around the globe. The fact that some 74 percent of volunteers have stayed in touch with their host homes is testimony to this.

Host family testimonies

“They have done many awareness raising activities in the community. In this short period, they became our family member… We will always love to welcome them.”
Santa Shrestha, host mother, Dhading, Nepal.

“TThe volunteers taught skills to us; they taught us management skills. With the skills training on financial literacy, my husband was able to save and bought his own car. The volunteers also helped us with how to keep animals; now we have more chickens. With the entrepreneurial skills, now we can do business at the market.”
Nanyuki, host mother, Kenya

“I cultivated an environment that allowed the volunteers to live harmoniously. The volunteers loved my hearty and homely meals. I encouraged them. I also linked them with networks in my community. ICS has engaged me a lot. I’m so busy in the community. I’ve started a disability group. ICS is a father in our community. It has shown us, it has built us.”
Mama Miriam, host mother, Kenya

Host homes

ICS volunteers live in the local community, staying in host homes and working closely with community members. The relationships that volunteers build with community members are crucial for sustainable change because they encourage diverse groups of community members to engage and participate across placement locations. These relationships also help increase the feeling of volunteer connectedness to, and responsibility for, the community.
Volunteer development

From selection through to placement and beyond, ICS volunteers experienced a dedicated learning journey and were supported to develop crucial skills in preparation for their future.

Through the programme, ICS volunteers gained key personal and professional development skills such as cross-cultural working, teamwork and leadership. Volunteers also gained crucial experience in resilience, adaptability and confidence which prepares them for the world of work, as well as developing a deeper understanding of poverty and global development.

An increase in confidence was one of the most widely reported changes experienced by UK volunteers, according to independent research by NEF Consulting. When asked about the effects of their ICS placement, nearly half of all volunteers stated that ICS had influenced their confidence ‘a lot’, while only 18.1 percent of volunteers responded ‘not at all’. The research also found that amongst UK volunteers, female volunteers and volunteers from lower income households were more likely to say that ICS had improved confidence than other groups.

Surveys of volunteers confirmed the benefits of the programme. For example:

- **77%** of ICS participants identified personal development as one of their top three achievements from placement.
- **74%** said that the experience had been very useful for their career development.
- **80%** of volunteers were in further education, employment or training one year after the placement.
For ICS alumnus and 28-year-old tech entrepreneur Kennedy Mmari, who in 2019 was named as one of the most 100 influential young Africans, his ICS experience was key:

Kennedy was one of the first volunteers to work with Raleigh ICS in Tanzania in 2013. Having grown up in the city, his awareness of the realities of rural life for the country’s poorest came as a shock when he discovered a lack of local knowledge about the link between disease and unclean water.

“In the rural village of Mgongo, local people simply didn’t know about good sanitation practices. When we arrived, they were drinking from boreholes in the ground, most of the time without filtering or boiling the water, and in some cases, sharing the water source with animals.”

His company Serengeti Bytes now offers services in PR, communications and digital marketing, and has seen him become an employer and nurturer of talent too.

“In Tanzania, youth unemployment is a huge challenge. There’s a skills mismatch, lack of opportunities and a real absence of a supportive entrepreneurial culture. So it feels incredible to not only help these young people to earn a salary but also to encourage them to start their own initiatives when the opportunity arises.”

“I’ll always be grateful to ICS. Before I volunteered, I could hardly speak in public, let alone lead meetings or a pitch. These are real world private sector skills that I just didn’t have or knew I needed. My ICS experience was tough and showed me another side to life in my country, but also prepared me to go into business.”
Bharat Thakrar – Personal Development

Former ICS volunteer Bharat Thakrar, 30, from Harlow in the UK, was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2020. Bharat was recognised for his voluntary and charitable services in the UK and overseas, including setting up his own charity, Poverty Pound, to tackle poverty in the UK. Bharat says that ICS was instrumental to his decision to open his own charity.

“My ICS placement in Lindi, Tanzania made me come back and decide to set up my own charity in the UK and get young people involved. For me, ICS was an absolutely incredible, life-changing experience. ICS teaches you a skill that you’ll never learn in a job, and it taught me a lot about myself. I learnt to be open-minded and adaptable and I learnt the importance of understanding the needs of community members.”

“Poverty Pound focuses on tackling poverty in the UK by providing essential items to those living below the poverty line. I want to get young people inspired to make a difference.”
Research

Throughout ICS, research and learning has been a crucial focus to ensure we understand how change happens and the impact we have on the volunteers and communities we work with. Two research highlights are the ICS Social Return on Investment Evaluation, which was conducted by NEF Consulting and the final evaluation of the ICS programme, which was completed in 2019.

This research demonstrates the socio-economic value that ICS volunteers generate for themselves as a result of the skills and experiences of the ICS programme, such as confidence, international networking, and increased active citizenship.

The research found that for every £1 spent on the programme, £4.64 is generated in social value. However, this increases to £4.99 for female volunteers, and £5.68 for volunteers from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

ICS Social Return on Investment Evaluation

The research also found that volunteers reported increased levels of confidence, were involved in higher levels of active citizenship post-placement than is found generally amongst 16-24 year olds in England, and the majority felt they had improved their ability to work in a multicultural environment as a result of their placement.
ICS Evaluation

The ICS Evaluation was concluded in 2019 and explored how effective change is facilitated by our volunteers in the communities they work in. It also looked at the outcomes that our volunteers experience, and the mechanisms that exist for this change.

It found:

- ICS volunteers experienced positive changes in their personal and social development, including their ongoing active citizenship. The clearest changes appear to be those relating to personal attributes such as resilience, adaptability and confidence. There is also strong evidence of ICS having led to positive changes in volunteers’ abilities to solve problems, communicate and collaborate, as well as in their sense of responsibility to the world around them and their belief that they can make a difference.

- Significant changes are also seen in alumni’s attitudes and practices around volunteering, including their motivations, the causes they support and the types of activities they undertake, as well as the frequency and depth of their volunteer engagements.

- Relationships are central to creating change. The relationships that volunteers build with community members are crucial for sustainable change because they encourage diverse groups of community members to engage and participate across placement locations. These relationships also help increase the feeling of volunteer connectedness to, and responsibility for, local and global communities.

- ICS volunteers work effectively with groups who are traditionally marginalised – ICS focused on inclusion within the communities in which we worked with and reached out to groups of people who are traditionally marginalised, such as women, youth, children and people with disabilities.

- ICS volunteers facilitate information and knowledge sharing, and link communities with vital services – ICS volunteers help improve levels of knowledge in the community about a range of topics such as health, education and livelihoods, as well as social issues like gender equality, early child marriage and disability rights. ICS volunteers are also great at connecting individuals and groups across communities with vital services such as savings groups, inclusive schooling and community health services.
Alumni and National Youth Engagement Networks

We are committed to empowering young people to contribute to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and continue their journey as active citizens after their ICS placement.

We have supported our alumni to develop their own meaningful activities and built active networks of national ICS returned volunteers in the countries we work in across the world.

National Youth Engagement Networks (NYENs) have been set up in Kenya, Tanzania, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, the UK, Nigeria and Uganda. With participatory development principles at their core, the youth networks are co-designed and co-delivered by youth, generating innovative solutions to community problems.

They are a part of the ICS legacy and continue to develop and grow. For example, 33 percent of the volunteers in the NYEN in Tanzania are new volunteers, bought into the network through the referrals of former ICS volunteers. Other networks see similar trends, for instance 41 percent of NYEN Bangladesh and 30 percent of NYEN Cambodia are new youth volunteers and have been bought in by former ICS volunteers.

In April 2020, the ICS programme pivoted to focus on mobilising youth networks, as all international and national volunteering was paused due to Covid-19. This established the huge potential of these networks of young people to enact change, with many of the NYENs providing Covid-19 prevention information to their communities.

Bangladesh

Since forming in 2017, NYEN Bangladesh has brought together young people across the country to advocate for youth led change. The network is fighting for gender equality by providing access to information on safe menstrual practices, dignity kits and advocating to end period shame. They are also campaigning to end the harmful practice of child marriages through their Child Not Bride Campaign, they are increasing girls’ attendance in school and ensuring girls now their rights and their worth. In 2020, NYEN Bangladesh engaged 3,034 youth and community members with Covid-19 prevention initiatives including training, street campaigns and peer-counselling.

Cambodia

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, Cambodia’s National Youth Engagement Network members were at the forefront of activities, bringing awareness and safeguarding practices to marginalised and rural communities. Reacting to the economic burden that has also come with the pandemic, they are also partnering with local job centres to provide entrepreneurship skills to young people.

UK

Young peoples’ education, employment chances and well-being are being disproportionately affected due to Covid-19. In November, the UK’s National Youth Engagement Network brought together over 70 young people and 3 UK youth employment organisations, for an online employability fortnight, providing a platform for young people to discuss the challenges of getting into employment during Covid-19 and the resources and help on offer. The network also partnered with Kooth, an online mental wellbeing community, bringing together young people for an online workshop on mental health.
Menstruating is a normal part of teenage girls’ lives. Yet in the coastal region of southern Bangladesh, menstruation is stigmatised to such an extent that many are missing out on education. What’s more, many girls are putting their health at risk by using unsanitary practices to manage their period.

Bangladeshi volunteer Urida Afrin received an ICV Alumni Grant to help keep girls in education. Urida worked with five schools to create ‘menstrual hygiene management’ corners. In each school, these corners will provide a safe space for girls to access reliable information on menstruation and support for healthy and hygienic practices. Through this, it is hoped that period-induced absenteeism each month will be eradicated, and girls can focus on their education, feeling safe and supported while at school.

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In Tanzania, one in six girls aged 15-19 is married. Almost 40 percent of 18 years old girls are already mothers or pregnant with their first child. Faced with the challenges of early pregnancy and negative attitudes from their community, many drop out of education. This premature end to their education puts these girls at greater risk of discrimination and means they have reduced opportunities for employment in the longer term.

Tanzanian volunteer Mwanat Shaban was inspired to apply for the ICV Alumni Grant as she wanted to help young girls escape from extreme poverty. Mwanat’s project empowered local women and teenage girls with useful entrepreneurship skills, specifically in horticulture (growing plants). This will not only help them financially through a new and sustainable method of earning money, but also built their confidence, enhancing their access to information and community decision making.
The current contract for ICS, delivered by VSO in partnership with Restless Development and Raleigh International, has come to its planned end, with discussions ongoing about what a new scheme might look like. We’d like to thank the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) for the opportunity to run ICS, which has shown the undeniable power of youth volunteering. We’d also like to thank our current partners Restless Development and Raleigh International, as well as former partners, such as Balloon Ventures, Challenges Worldwide, International Service, Tearfund, Progressio and YCare International, for building this project with us. Lastly, we’d like to thank everyone who has volunteered with ICS – you have created a legacy which will continue to inspire and create change across the world.