

# Informal education for citizenship

## The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association (IAA)<sup>1</sup>

### Foundations: personal and social

Since the 1990s, the IAA has joined the Commonwealth, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Scout/Guide movement and others in renewed calls for youth participation in decision-making. The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award collaborates with the Commonwealth at a number of levels. In Zambia, for example, the President's Youth Award is led by the Commonwealth Youth Programme together with the National Youth Development Council and delivered through 20 schools and youth organisations.

The Award was co-founded by Kurt Hahn (1886–1974), who was a media analyst and policy advisor, then a teacher who advocated for access to quality education, and finally a champion of international peace and reconciliation. His educational principles stressed non-competitive, all-round development of individuals for the sustainable benefit of humanity: "I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self denial, and above all, compassion."<sup>2</sup>

The Award's great strength is its appeal to young people, who respond well to the spirit of enterprise and adventure it



*The IAA's Project Murembo focuses on girls in Arusha (Tanzania), Gulu (Uganda) and Turkaria (Kenya)*

encourages, as well as its capturing of the energies of adult volunteers who care about the citizens of the future.

Youth participation does not negate the vital role of adults, or imply that they give up their share of responsibility. Rather, it calls for meaningful dialogue involving adults and young people. Voluntary participation is crucial, but it is not a panacea. It cannot solve everything. Structural concerns such as legal arrangements, inequity, racism and other forms of institutionalised discrimination have an enormous bearing on youth development and well-being. Participatory processes are nothing if they do not increase such awareness; worse than nothing if they distract awareness. Young people want to look outside of themselves and make connections between 'their' issues and other development issues. The more engaged they are, the more connections they see.

Participation cannot be instituted out of thin air. This is especially true in contexts where social relationships tend to be organised in a highly hierarchical manner and young people have little status or voice. Many organisations have commissioned papers, published toolkits and crafted ambitious policy statements that came to nothing. By contrast, conventional schooling tends to be less focused on self-development – but its structures are stable and enduring. A meeting between the formal and informal in education can therefore be very fruitful. Almost as soon as it was launched in the UK in the 1950s, the Award was taken up by schools and youth groups in other countries as it easily adapted to different cultures and societies. It soon flourished and within 10 years had been adopted by 16 countries. In 2012, there are some 65,000 participants in Commonwealth member countries.

## Snapshot of an Award leader in Bangladesh

An eye-opening period of service in a Bangladeshi old people's home led Farhana Meghami, a Gold Award participant, to create a groundbreaking project to empower not just its elderly female residents but many other women in her local community. While completing her Service Section at the Bangladesh Association of the Aged home, she noticed that there were many female residents who did not need to be there but who had nowhere else to go; their families could not support them and they could not support themselves financially. Some of the women wept all day due to the difficulty of their circumstances: their poverty, isolation and sense of helplessness. According to the Asia Development Bank (2001), one in four women in Bangladesh will be widowed or divorced by the age of 50. As their participation in the labour market is much lower than that of men, finding themselves alone frequently means that they also find themselves without an income.

Farhana discovered a reservoir of untapped talent among the women in the home, with several of them highly skilled in patchwork and other handicrafts. These talented women were willing both to teach younger women the art of patchwork and also to continue to make their own crafts: baskets made from leftover jute and bamboo sticks, bed covers, table mats and handbags. The project has had a direct impact on over 400 women. Following a display of the work at Bangladesh's annual international trade fair, foreign buyers signed up for regular purchases and, most importantly, these women were recognised

for the first time in their lives for their ingenuity and talent. The income was distributed equally among the groups of women involved, enabling them to dramatically improve their standard of living and meet their families' basic needs. As a result of her entrepreneurial drive, Farhana was asked to represent the International Award Association at the Twelfth Commonwealth India Small Business Competitiveness Development Programme in late May 2011.

## Snapshot of the Award in East Africa

*Youth in this region face many real challenges including unemployment, high levels of poverty, disproportionate exposure to high health and social risk and a lack of opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.*

*Edwin Kimani, IAA Africa Regional Director*

Open Award Centres (OACs) are a tried-and-tested model that can engage those who are not in school. OACs have already been successfully established in Gulu, Northern Uganda, and Nakuru in the Rift Valley Province, Kenya. The project in the United Republic of Tanzania will operate through the IAA's partnership with SOS Children's Villages, which was developed in early 2010<sup>3</sup>. The Award has also been introduced in Burundi and Rwanda in partnership with SOS Children's Village International. Building on the Award's philosophy of non-discrimination, these two nations are hoping to use the project to strive for unity without discrimination on the basis of a person's tribe.

Meanwhile, Project Murembo (meaning 'beautiful girl'), a new initiative of IAA's Africa Office, focuses on young girls in marginalised areas in Arusha (Tanzania), Gulu (Uganda) and Turkana (Kenya). Supported by the Dulverton Trust and the Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust, the Project will introduce the Award to 10,000 young people, the majority of whom will be young

### Box 1

#### Rebuilding self-esteem and livelihoods in Northern Uganda

Denis Tabo, a Gold Award participant from Gulu in Northern Uganda, is helping young people affected by the long-running civil war to rebuild their self-esteem and livelihoods. On leaving high school, Denis decided to volunteer for the Uganda Red Cross Society, working with internally displaced persons, as a way of doing something positive for his community. While there, he encountered the Award and began his own programme of self-development, built on a commitment to learning. Through the Gulu Youth Centre, Denis came into contact with boys who were deeply traumatised by their experiences of the conflict – many had become involved in crime and had few opportunities to find work and make positive life choices. He recognised their need for activities that would help them to heal and reconcile with their communities and also wanted to improve their chances of building sustainable livelihoods. Channelling his own interest in media and the arts, Denis's Raw Talent project has enabled young people to learn media production and storytelling skills through which they can find a voice and a job.

## Box 2

### Nairobi student takes on primary challenge

On visiting Wairuri Primary School in Maragua, Central Province, 17-year-old Rachel Nyokabi Wanjohi was confronted by a host of challenges that included a lack of clean water, first-aid facilities, sports equipment or a library. She also found that school books and stationery were in very short supply. The girls in particular were facing many barriers to continuing their education, including a lack of access to sanitary pads and an emphasis on early marriage (which meant that many were pregnant by the age of 13).

According to Uwezo Kenya (2011), one in ten schools in the country have no useable toilet, four in ten schools have no drinking water, less than three in ten schools are issuing sanitary towels, and only one in four schools have a stocked first-aid kit. On any single day, 13 out of 100 teachers are not in school.

Rather than feeling completely overwhelmed by what she experienced, Rachel has determinedly picked off one issue after another. She hopes to improve living standards for the pupils, encourage them to stay at school and thereby improve their future prospects, and motivate them to believe that they can bring about change in their own lives.

Calling on fellow students from Braeside High School to help, Rachel collected KES30,000 (about US\$362) through fundraising activities such as bake sales. This purchased a 6,000-litre water tank. In addition, she secured enough funding to purchase sanitary pads for the girls for three months so that they did not need to miss school. Through sponsorship, she was also able to raise sufficient funds to plant trees in the school grounds so that each pupil had a tree to look after.

After stationery was collected from students at Rachel's own school and distributed at Wairuri, the marks of pupils there rose by an average of 20 points. More importantly, their self-esteem rose as they realised that they could do well at school if they invested time and energy in it.

women, over the next two years. Its aim is to empower participants and their communities, increasing their sense of civic responsibility and reducing the incidence of early pregnancy, early marriage and HIV and AIDS. In so doing, it will address a number of the Millennium Development Goals and respond to commitments from leaders in the region.

In 2011, delegates at a major leadership training event in Kenya (International Gold Event) went on to participate at the Commonwealth Youth Forum in Perth, Australia, and the Commonwealth Local Government Young Professionals Forum in Cardiff, UK.

### References

Asian Development Bank (2001). *Country Briefing Paper: women in Bangladesh*. Available at: [http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/bangla/women\\_ban\\_adb.pdf](http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/bangla/women_ban_adb.pdf)

Uwezo Kenya (2011). *Annual Learning Assessment Report: Kenya 2011*. Available at: <http://dl.dropbox.com/u/9310905/Kenya/Assessment%202011/Results/National%20Report.pdf>

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> With thanks to Cristal de Saldanha, Executive Director (International Programme) at the IAA and Laura Thackray, Head of Communications, IAA.
- <sup>2</sup> Quotes and speeches by Kurt Hahn are available at [www.kurthahn.org](http://www.kurthahn.org)
- <sup>3</sup> If successful, the project could be replicated in Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zambia. In Angola, Brazil, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands and elsewhere, there is a strong peace-building component to the Award programme.

**The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award** is a self-development programme offered to 14–25-year-olds in over 140 countries and territories worldwide. The Award involves physical recreation and expeditions alongside skills building and community service.