

Title: Achieving Peace with PACE: A Digital Lab for Peace, Awareness, Collaboration and Empowerment for rural India

Country: India

International Students House

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Section I: Narrative

a. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

The main goal of the project was to lift the opportunity barriers for the students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), Nandurbar, Maharashtra, India. It was achieved through the establishment of a digital lab in the school and organising a two-week-long inspiration workshop series to support the skill development critical for 21st-century success.

b. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

Yes, we received a very generous support from the Rotary Club, India. They have promised to provide 40 computers (~\$11,000) in the school. The computers are expected to be installed in the school by the end of September 2021. The process has been taking time due to COVID-19 situation in India. This generous support has allowed us to use the funds for getting interactive panels, printers and speakers for the school.

c. How did you come up with the idea for your project?

The idea of the project stemmed from my personal experiences as I have also studied in one of the JNV schools. We had extremely limited access to basic Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, and opportunities to learn 21st – century skills such as English Language, digital literacy, communication, and career awareness. This narrative was exceedingly relatable to JNV Nandurbar. It is in one of the most backward regions in the country where lives are surrounded by poverty, illiteracy and yet to experience the magic of technology.

d. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?

Inequality is one of the biggest issues that we face in today's world. A simple accident of birth determines the life outcome for many people, particularly in the developing world. Even though there is no one-dimensional solution to this, I strongly believe that quality education has the power to level the playing field. Through this project, we aimed to provide at-least modest opportunities to students to reach their full potential so that they can help their communities to move beyond a hand-to-mouth existence.

e. Why did you choose your host site to work in?

There are two main reasons - Firstly, the school is inherently in a disadvantaged position due to its remote location and years of socio-economic deprivation. This has resulted in students' extremely limited access to advanced facilities like IT and computer infrastructure leading to inadequate training in 21st-century skills. Secondly, the school is selective, enrolling students from rural backgrounds based on their academic merit.

f. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?

At the time of project implementation, India was fighting the second wave of COVID-19 which forced us to do the project remotely. This was a major setback for me and the team as we didn't know how we could execute the project without being present on the site.

g. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?

The major challenge arose from the connectivity issues. We organised the workshop series online, however, many students didn't have a good internet connection which made it difficult to communicate

with them. Also, the time difference between India and the UK hindered us from getting immediate responses from the parties that we were working with.

h. How do you define peace?

I believe that peace is not just the opposite of conflict but speaks to a broader context of equality, access to basic human needs, and prosperity. If you can sleep without having to worry about making ends meet and have modest opportunities to reach your potential, that's when the peace seems accessible to a common person.

i. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

In the short term, the project has contributed to the peace by lifting the technology barrier for the students of JNV Nandurbar. The computers, interactive panels, printers, and Wi-Fi connections would enhance the teaching-learning experience in the school. Moreover, the skills-workshop series has inspired students to start their skill-building journey. One of the students wrote in the feedback that- *"It was a wonderful experience attending the series. Everything you taught is very useful and fruitful as well. The apps that you shared like 'knuge me', 'LinkedIn', 'Karta Connect', are all really useful and I am already using them. You have also encouraged us a lot so that we could also take such initiatives in future. I must say that it was an amazing initiative of you all and we all are very much benefited because of you."*

In the long term, we envisage that these students will be the ladder builder for their communities. They will give back to their communities and lead the road for sustained prosperity and hence peace.

j. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?

Giving back to my community is one of the things that I value the most in my life. My project gave me an incredible opportunity to serve the underserved. I feel empowered as well as inspired to make the world a peaceful place. I derive a great deal of confidence from this experience, and I would like to continue giving back in whichever way I can.

k. Was your project impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Covid-19 impacted our project from Day-1. There was a big confusion around whether we could travel to India to implement the project. It took us 2-3 weeks to finally come to the conclusion that we have to implement the project remotely. This posed problems to both the components of the project – workshop series and digital lab set-up. For the workshop series, we made the recording, notes and assignments available to those who couldn't attend the live sessions. Google Classroom was a big saviour in managing this. For the digital lab, we received great support from the school's principal. It was through his connections; we could find good deals for IT equipment. I think, having someone you trust on the site is very helpful in the execution of the project and for us it was the school's principal, Mr Maske.

l. please provide a one- to two-sentence personal statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result.

"This project has filled me with confidence, hope and enthusiasm that the world will be a peaceful place for everyone. I am truly grateful to Davis Projects for Peace for believing in my idea and giving me this incredible opportunity." Sadanand Ugale.

Section II: Photographs



