

## **Duke University**

### **Cultivating Youth's Peace-Building Skills: The Karsh Mentorship Initiative**

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### **Problem Statement**

21st-century Nepal faces conflicts such as political instability, environmental injustice, unequal educational opportunities, and repression of women's rights (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Young Nepali students possess a unique combination of awareness and energy that, if cultivated, would address these issues in effective ways. However, a new, agentic model education is required to support students in fulfilling Nepal's goal of an engaged citizenry. Traditional models of education in Nepal have been shown to stifle civic engagement, forcing students to memorize facts instead of pushing them to act against conflicts that affect their daily lives (Graner, 2006; Rajak, 2015). Thus, issues that desperately need youth activism and energy are left to fester and multiply.

Throughout summer 2018, the Karsh Mentorship Initiative (KMI) documented instances of this educational problem at several partner schools in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal. In structured interviews, students discussed how they believed their education was failing them - focusing too much on theory and too little on practical knowledge about how to create change in their society. Shanker Paudel, principal of one of KMI's partner schools, echoed their sentiment, arguing that the greatest challenge facing the Nepali education system lies in creating opportunities for youth to engage in experiential learning that will better the nation. Broader analyses of education in Nepal concur with the local attitudes of students and principals (Graner, 2006). To Nepali students, principals, teachers, and policy-makers, education is not just a matter of knowledge. It is a matter of peace.

### **Solution Statement**

Believing that vibrant learning communities will cultivate Nepali youth's potential to build peace in the 21st century, KMI proposes an agentic model of education for peace: cultivating skills of leadership, empathy, and advocacy among Nepali secondary students. To engage students in these skills, KMI will partner with at least five Nepali secondary schools to lead three two-week-long after-school programs (coined "Peace Forums") with a diverse set of at least 60 Nepali students in the ninth grade. Through these Peace Forums, students will address issues critical to sustainable peace, such as environmental injustice, child labor, and unequal educational opportunities.

These forums will employ a fusion of culturally relevant pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and project-based learning - methods that empower students to critique their social conditions and address self-identified conflicts in their communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Freire, 1970; Krajcik & Shin, 2014). Over the course of a Peace Forum, students will initially create and share their own individual "life graphs", developing empathy and finding common ground. Next, students will reflect on collaborative exercises such as "The Human Knot" and "Building Bridges", articulating and expanding their conceptions of leadership and collaboration.

In the second week of each Peace Forum, students will put these peace-building skills into action by designing and implementing a social impact project. Students will follow the framework of design-thinking (from the Stanford Design School), defining a societal conflict threatening peace in their community, prototyping a solution with their peers, and finally implementing their solution within their community.

### **Solution Implementation**

To conduct its first Peace Forums with over 60 Nepali students, KMI will sustain and expand its partnerships with several public and private schools. In Kathmandu, KMI will continue relationships with CVM Secondary School and SOS Hermann-Gmeiner School Sanothimi, adding Siddheshwor Secondary School to its network. In Pokhara, KMI will continue its relationship with Shanti Niketan School, while forging partnerships with SOS Hermann-Gmeiner School Pokhara. Further, KMI will continue to harness the expertise of Laxmi Rajak - a native Nepali, Duke graduate, and Teach for Nepal Evaluation Director who founded KMI.

### **Timeline and Activities**

February - April: Train Duke mentors in Peace Forum curriculum, coordinate partnerships with new schools through existing networks.

Early May: Arrive in Nepal, make final preparations for Peace Forums (e.g. buy supplies, reserve classroom space, recruit students).

Mid-May: Run 1st Peace Forum in Kathmandu.

End of May: Run 2nd Peace Forum in Pokhara.

Early June: Run 3rd Peace Forum in Kathmandu.

Mid-June: Draft project sustainability plans with partner schools and return to Duke University.

### **Projected Outcomes and Sustainability**

By mid-June, KMI will have prepared over 60 Nepali youths to advocate for their own vision of peace - whether it be gender equality or environmental justice. Specifically, these students will have developed skills in leadership, empathy, and advocacy - skills otherwise stifled by traditional educational models (Graner, 2006). In turn, these 60 students will begin to rally others behind their vision, creating a ripple effect that will normalize the idea of youth advocacy. Beyond individual students, KMI's Peace Forums will have engaged at least five prominent school leaders in reflection on integrating peace-building curricula into the Nepali education system in culturally-relevant ways. As Nepali school leaders share these ideas with their colleagues, KMI's concept of education-for-peace will begin to expand across networks. Thus, by enacting its first Peace Forums, KMI will have ignited a broader educational movement for peace.