

THE DESH APNAYEN

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Creating alert, informed and active citizens for a better India



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

India is the largest democracy in the world. As of today, our population is approximately 1.5 billion! The good news is that young people comprise the core of our country's population. The idea of The ACT*i*ZENS' Club, our flagship programme, was developed to harness this potential. By enabling students to receive opportunities that can help them become *alert, informed and active citizens*, we aspire to create a better India.

The world is going through a difficult time on multiple fronts - environmental, social, economic, political. Hence, the monthly activities that we create for members of the Club are pivoted around important civic and social issues. In the last quarter, students deepened their understanding of constitutional rights, laws, elections, political parties, and the Parliament and its functions.

Our endeavour at Desh Apnayan is to provide students with relevant knowledge in a fun and engaging manner, and we hit the mark with our activities. Students took part enthusiastically in classroom discussions and learned how to voice their opinions with clarity and conviction.

Another goal is to ensure that Club members cultivate a richer understanding of their immediate surroundings - schools, neighbourhoods and local governments. We also wish to foster the ability to turn knowledge into action among them. We are happy to report that we have made remarkable progress in achieving this. The students gave ideas to strengthen certain policies within the school, conducted awareness campaigns, participated in a Democracy Index Survey, and came up with possible solutions for certain civic issues in their vicinity.

The ACT*i*ZEN Leadership Lab, a new initiative that we offered to students who cleared an extensive selection process, also produced some heartening results.

Students' desire to take steps, however small, to make their community and our country a better place to live in for each of its citizens is one of our chief inspirations.

THE ACT*i*ZENS' CLUB

Here is a brief overview of the Club activities that we offered to our partner schools - government schools in Goa and Bhopal and private schools in a number of states - in the last quarter:

OCTOBER ACTIVITIES

Rightful Citizen

This activity introduced students to the concept of rights, and built an understanding of the responsibilities that come along with it. To gauge their perception of how democratic they find their home, school, society and country, students were asked to give their rating on a Democracy Index Survey that was shared with them.

My Political Agenda

Students formed their own political parties, discussed and designed manifestos, and elected their leaders. It was a fun re-enactment of the Indian political party system.

Pass the Bill

Students learnt about the passing of bills through a mock Parliament setup in the classroom, designed to stimulate the young minds. The activity included drafting of bills, along with a brief introduction to government websites to understand the process of taking feedback from citizens for the drafting.

Institutional Web

Through this activity, students got a glimpse of how institutions are the driving features of economic and human development. Along with other social structures, they influence the trajectories of societal change. Within smaller groups, each student was asked to imagine that they represent a particular institution, and speak about it.

Students were also given information about Government of India's 'Shoonya – Zero Pollution Mobility' campaign, to study and design flowcharts based on some questions.

NOVEMBER ACTIVITIES

Know Your Local Government

This activity included a research project and role-play through which students learnt more about their local government and its functioning, and how citizens could collaborate with the government.

My School, My Policies

School policies are vital tools in creating school culture and supporting students and staff. There are many issues that schools need to tackle at a policy level from students' perspective.

Some of the Club members created an anti-bullying policy for their school, and also attempted to ensure that all their schoolmates are made aware of the new policy and the mechanisms for seeking help.

My Democratic School

The students were familiarised with what school governance looks like in democratic schools versus conventional schools. Through a role-play activity, they showcased key features of both types of schools on topics such as admission policy, subjects taught, etc.

Judiciary - Rules and Laws

In this activity, students learnt about some of the laws followed by other countries, and shared their own points of view about the pros and cons of introducing those laws in our country.

They researched laws online from home, and made a presentation to the class in the next session. They also reflected on any other laws that they would like to see in India.

DECEMBER ACTIVITIES

ACTiZEN Awareness through Art

Socially engaged art can raise consciousness and shift perspectives, spurring behavioural change. Art and craft are a great outlet to explore, express and create.

Students were encouraged to design posters and other material to sensitise people about the unintended, negative consequences of publicly celebrated festivals, such as increase in crowds and traffic, generation of waste, etc.

My Citizenship Duty

The issues addressed through this activity included pollution, road safety and waste management. Students read up about them and brainstormed on steps to create awareness on these issues.

The ACTiZEN Pledge Challenge

Taking a pledge can work as a form of 'pre-commitment' - a promise to do an action. Students created a pledge chart and listed five steps that they will take and continue over the next one week as their contribution to fix a problem that needed attention and action.

My Neighbourhood Project

Students created survey questions related to the prevalence of certain civic issues in their locality, got responses from local residents, analysed the findings, and discussed possible solutions.

CONSTITUTION DAY CELEBRATIONS

Many great Indians left us with a dream, a legacy and an instrument of shaping an ethical India. These are embodied in the Constitution of India, which was adopted on 26th November 1949. To commemorate Constitution Day, we had designed special activities.

We are enormously humbled to learn that the activities that we had put together for the 15 government schools of Bhopal that are part of our 2022-23 pilot programme ended up being rolled out to **7,014 schools** in Madhya Pradesh, reaching around **1.2 lakh students!** Such faith in what we are committed to, pushes us to keep evolving in order to catalyse lasting change.

STUDENT WORKSHOPS

With a zeal to constantly improve our offerings, we take feedback from teachers, through an online form each month as well as over periodic phone calls and in-person conversations. Our School Engagement Officers undertake classroom visits, so that they can gather insights to help us ensure high standards in the creation and delivery of the monthly activities.

Recently, we went a step further by involving college students and the office-bearers of The ACTiZENS' Club. In Goa, we reached out to students pursuing Home Science courses and those who are members of the National Service Scheme (NSS) to explore their willingness and suitability for becoming a volunteer of Desh Apnayen.



A total of 38 students participated in the workshops conducted by our Head of Research, **Dr. Garima Tailang** and our Programme Manager, **Mr. Daniel Gonsalves** over two sessions in December 2022. Volunteers then visited the government school assigned to them, and witnessed the monthly activities conducted by the teachers. They shared their reflections in a feedback form as well as over a debriefing call with our Research team.



THE ACTiZEN LEADERSHIP LAB

OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of The ACTiZEN Leadership Lab initiative were to enable the students to learn how to solve a civic issue through an action project, understand the various facets that shape and influence democracy, sharpen 21st century skills, build strong emotional self-reliance, and become empathetic towards individual stakeholders and society at large.

THE LAUNCH

We kicked off the pilot edition of the Lab on 9th May 2022 with a keynote address by our founder **Mr. Vallabh Bhanshali** on 'Why India Needs Democracy 2.0 and ACTiZENS'.

Over the next four days, students from 14 schools participated in workshops on the topics of democracy, systems thinking and Anapana meditation by **Prof. Yugank Goyal**, **Mr. Vinod Sreedhar** and **Mr. Ram Meghrajani** respectively.

Workshops by Experts:



Prof. Yugank Goyal
Associate Professor,
FLAME University



Mr. Vinod Sreedhar
Founder, Journeys With Meaning



Mr. Ram Meghrajani
Vipassana Research Institute



In Bhopal, our plan was to empower the office-bearers of the Club - the President and Vice-President - so that they can hone their observational skills to make their feedback more robust. 35 office-bearers and their teachers took part in the workshop conducted by our Head of Programmes, **Ms. Urmila Joshi** on 6th December 2022.



We are immensely grateful to all the school and college students who made the time and effort to apply a more focused lens on various aspects of our Club programme, thereby strengthening our work and enabling us to achieve profound impact over time.

Students were also introduced to the team from NGO **Bala Janaagraha** who worked closely with them as mentors throughout the duration of the Lab, along with our CEO, **Mr. Anurag Sharma**, Head of Programmes, **Ms. Urmila Joshi** and Head of Research, **Dr. Garima Tailang** who supported the students as co-mentors.

THE MENTORING SESSIONS

Mentors:



Ms. Sumathi Raj



Mr. Shreyas BM



Ms. Ranjitha UR

Students formed teams and worked on 22 civic action projects on one of three themes - Road Safety, Waste Management and Water Conservation. The mentors explained the 5I Design Thinking Framework, i.e., how to **identify** an issue that needs to be solved, **investigate** it, **ideate** on and **implement** solutions, and **inform** people about it to build support.

THE ACTiZEN TALKS

Guest Speakers:



Mr. Shailesh Pathak
Director, Indian School of Public Policy



Ms. Svati Chakravarty Bhatkal
Communications Specialist



Mr. Kalyan Akkipeddi
Founder, ProtoVillage

We also hosted three talks followed by Q&A sessions for the students who were participating in The ACTiZEN Leadership Lab, their principals, teachers and parents.

Each speaker was carefully curated to expose the students to a wide range of ideas and experiences that would propel them in their journey towards becoming an ACTiZEN.

Mr. Shailesh Pathak who has over three decades of experience in both the private sector as well as the government as an IAS officer spoke on 'Building a Partnership between Government and Citizens'.

Ms. Svati Chakravarty Bhatkal, co-director and head of field research of the popular television show *Satyamev Jayate* spoke on how we can engage with media, as citizens and documentarians.

Mr. Kalyan Akkipeddi, an engineer with an MBA degree, who left a high-paying corporate job in 2010 to spend his life with one of the poorest communities of India, based in a village in Andhra Pradesh, also joined us as a guest speaker. The theme of his talk was 'My Experiences of Building a Resilient Rural Community'.

THE GRADUATION PROCESS

Certificates of Completion were awarded to 45 students based on the graduation criteria pertaining to attendance, participation and learning. A Grand Jury Round was held on 2nd October inviting the six best teams to showcase their work to our jury members, **Mr. Shivkumar Menon** (who leads Bala Janaagraha) and **Mr. Sandeep Aggarwal** (start-up mentor and philanthropist).

Shortlisted teams were selected on the basis of their demonstrated ability to engage with the local government bodies and the community with an aim to solve the civic issue that they had chosen.

Four best teams were felicitated at the Graduation Ceremony on 9th October along with other graduates as well as the principals, teachers and parents who played an instrumental role in the students' Lab journey.

STORIES OF CHANGE

Every drop counts: Om's monitoring system for efficiency



Om Pawar from St. Mary's High School in Mumbai took up a project on water conservation. Om identified an issue in his housing colony, where he observed a water tank constantly overflowing resulting in water wastage. He took it upon himself to come up with a mechanism to prevent this wastage.

As a possible solution, he met with the Secretary of the society and requested that the person in charge of the tanks monitor the time required to fill one tank and incorporate sufficient break in filling all five tanks. After a few attempts, this practice became successful and he was able to conserve a substantial amount of water.



Before



After

Students' efforts resulting in on-ground change

Paving a path of change

The newly odour-free and clean street near Netaji Colony in Visakhapatnam is a good example of how joint effort and a strategic plan can bring about change. As part of The ACT/ZEN Leadership Lab, six students from Sri Ramakrishna School - **M. Veda Sree, B. Harsha Vardhan, D. Lakshmi Neeraja, M. Madhumitha, K. Baladitya and Mohammed Mohari Zahara** - decided to put an end to littering around a garbage dump which was causing discomfort to passersby.

After conducting surveys as part of the 'Investigate' stage of their Lab journey, they came up with a two-pronged solution: spreading awareness to the residents about segregation of waste and placing garbage only inside the bins as well as requesting the municipality to do regular garbage cleaning.

Their online complaint on the government portal proved to be a successful endeavour as the area got cleaned within two days and a system for regular garbage collection was put in place by the authorities.

Speak out: Kanika explores the power of her voice

As a participant of The ACT/ZEN Leadership Lab, **Kanika Srinivasan** from Shri BS Mootha Girls Senior Secondary School in Chennai, too, realised that she had the power to make a difference.

Noticing a polluted pond at a nearby temple, she and her father proceeded to take pictures and make inquiries about the matter. She narrated their experience through a handwritten note.

A few days after she raised the issue, she saw that not only had the temple pond been cleaned, but also a new notice was put up, warning people of a fine of Rs. 500 if anyone was caught littering.

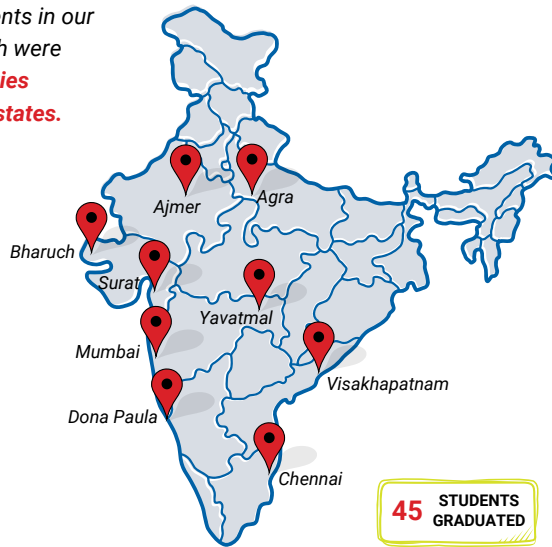
She was amazed to find out how with the simple act of drawing attention to the problem, she found both - a cure and a preventive measure for a problem! This was no less than a dream come true for her.



Noticeboard installed to prevent littering

THE LAB OVERVIEW (IN NUMBERS)

The students in our pilot batch were from **9 cities** across **7 states**.



Most of the graduating students have cited increase in confidence in interacting with strangers and increase in communication, problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

TESTIMONIALS



"As a Principal, I was interacting with the students regarding their project from the beginning and I could feel a sense of contentment when they got a chance to express their views. It was a great learning experience for the students and I was feeling quite fortunate to be part of such an initiative."

- Ms. Binita Negi, Principal, Narmada Calorx Public School, Bharuch

"The Lab was an incredible experience. It taught me a lot of things like how to be responsible and accountable, intellectual skills, confidence. I got out of my shell and learnt to be a good citizen."

- Ms. Rithikha R., Student, The PSBB Millennium School, Gerugambakkam



"I feel proud and content to have my child Mahimashree as a part of this Lab. She, along with her teammates, managed to overcome all hurdles and finalise a date to meet the local authority. We had never got a chance to collaborate with the government at such a young age and felt extremely happy to have such a great opportunity for our child."

- Ms. Radhika R., Parent



85% students from the Lab cohort believe that **working with local government can bring systemic and sustainable changes** in society.

62% students/teams **visited local government office**, while 31% approached them through online portal.

51% students **practiced Anapana meditation daily** and reported benefits such as feeling calm and improved concentration.

44% students reported that they feel more **empathetic** towards society.

THE DESH APNAYEN PLEDGE

आओ हम सब देश अपनायें,
“चलता है” को दूर भगायें,
भविष्य बचायें, भाग्य बनायें।

क्षणिक राष्ट्रीय भावना के आगे बढ़ें।
अगर हम नित्य देशहित के बारे में सोचें तो कठिन दिन
देखने ही न पड़े!
क्या आप यह शपथ लेंगे? औरों को भी दिलाएँ।

भारत देश हमारा है, मेरा है, तुम्हारा है,
इसकी रक्षा-उन्नति में, भाग्य-विकास हमारा है।

अगर चाहे सुख-शान्ति और स्वइच्छा का जीवन,
जरूरी है हम सब पर, कर्तव्यों का भी पालन।

चुनें हम अच्छी सरकार, और दें उसे पूरा सहकार,
हो उचित तो करें विरोध, देशहित की यही पुकार।

वादों का सच्चा, हर काम हो अच्छा, ऐसा हो हमारा
नाम,
पर अधिकार की रक्षा, दीन की सेवा, सर्वोपरि हमारा
काम।

कोई करे या न करे, न्याय पालना मेरा धरम,
गंद नहीं, देर नहीं, ऐसे हो हमारे करम।

मेरा देश सबसे पुराना, फिर बनेगा राष्ट्र महान,
हम तुम नित्य बनें बेहतर; बेहतर, बेहतर और महान।

मेरा प्रान्त पूरब-पश्चिम, मेरा ही है उत्तर-दक्षिण,
देश की प्रगति मेरा जिम्मा, लेता हूँ ये प्रण-प्रतिक्षण।

जय हिंद। जय हिंद। जय हिंद।

India belongs to all its citizens.
It belongs to me,
it belongs to us.

I have a right to live in peace
and purposefully.
But it is possible only if I live responsibly,
I work for its progress, peace and protection.

Along with the government meant for such action,
learn to protest when they need a correction and
together again till we see the correction.

India can remain ahead and great,
only when we remain great, I remain great.

If I respect the law even if some don't,
maintain cleanliness even if others don't,
keep my promises, have quality in all my work,
respect others' rights and help those without work.

I am capable, I am strong,
I belong to East, West, North and South.

I pledge to make our country strong,
I pledge to make India proud!



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