



# HOW VALUES & BELIEFS SHAPE EDUCATION IN ASIA

INSIGHTS FROM AVPN'S FAITH & GIVING INITIATIVE

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AVPN Faith & Giving  
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### About Faith and Giving Initiative by AVPN

AVPN aims to strengthen the work of faith-aligned givers in Asia and seed opportunities for funders and investors within faith groups, as well as those in the wider social investment community, to collaboratively move their capital towards impact. At AVPN, we view the relationship between faith and giving on a spectrum, and use the term “faith-aligned” to acknowledge a wide range of interpretations. The term 'faith' can encompass a general religious disposition to an individual's or an institution's adoption of particular beliefs or values at various levels of depth. Consequently, the expression of faith is necessarily a reflection of the internal stance of an individual or institution. This brief takes an intentionally inclusive approach and considers ‘faith’ as comprising the full range of beliefs, values, morals and principles, which inform behaviours and decision-making. With this definition, our goal is to surface best practices, facilitate knowledge exchange, and enable unlikely partnerships among diverse social investors in Asia. Visit [Faith & Giving in Asia](#) for more information about this initiative.

### About AVPN

AVPN is the world's largest network of social investors active in Asia, with over 600 funders and resource providers across 33 markets. AVPN enables collaborations between policymakers, family offices, foundations and the private sector to increase the impact and flow of capital deployed towards closing SDG gaps in Asia. AVPN's mission is to catalyse the movement towards a more strategic, collaborative and outcomes-focused approach to social investing, ensuring that resources are deployed as effectively as possible to address key social challenges facing Asia today and in the future.

# INTRODUCTION

**While the Asia-Pacific region has made significant strides in expanding access to education, deep disparities persist in learning outcomes, digital access, and education quality.** Approximately 16 million primary school-aged children and 34 million lower secondary-aged adolescents remain out of school, with a large proportion in South Asia.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, 20% of children in East Asia and the Pacific are still unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10, underscoring the region's learning poverty.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly salient in rural and underserved regions, where millions of children lack access to quality schooling. Inequalities in resources, infrastructure, and teaching quality, alongside underfunded education systems and technology gaps, exacerbate this divide. There is also a mismatch between traditional educational content and the future skills students need to thrive in modern social and work environments. Life skills, critical thinking, and socio-emotional learning are often absent from curricula, leaving students ill-prepared for contemporary demands.

**Education reduces poverty, improves health outcomes, and empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to society.** Each additional year of schooling, particularly at the primary and secondary levels, can increase an individual's earnings by approximately 10% and contribute to GDP growth.<sup>3</sup> In the Asia-Pacific, closing education gaps could avert USD 3 trillion in future earnings losses from disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, fostering financial literacy and critical thinking through education promotes economic stability and resilience. However, public social expenditure across Asia and the Pacific remains low. In 2023, public social protection expenditure in the Asia-Pacific region stood at 11.8% of GDP, significantly below the global average of 19.3% and well behind the OECD average of approximately 21% in 2022.<sup>5</sup> This underscores the potential for increased investment in education and related social services to drive and generate long-term social and economic benefits.

**Faith-aligned givers—philanthropists and investors motivated by their values—play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges.** For decades, faith-aligned giving has driven impactful education initiatives across Asia, expanding access to quality learning and enriching conventional education with a long-term, values-based perspective. Buddhist funders, for example, have contributed significantly to education for underserved children, whilst Islamic philanthropic practices such as *infaq* (spending or disbursement to please Allah), *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving), and *waqf* (Islamic endowment funds) in countries such as Indonesia have been observed in funding scholarships and supporting primary and tertiary education. Faith-aligned capital in education complements conventional methods by instilling core values and emphasising socio-emotional principles, fostering a holistic approach to character development.

<sup>1</sup> The Diplomat, 2019, [The Asia-Pacific's Education Crisis](#)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, n.d., [Education](#)

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank Group, 2023, [50 years after landmark study, returns to education remain strong](#)

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, 2022, [Catalysing Education 4.0 Investing in the Future of Learning for a Human-Centric Recovery](#)

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization, 2024, [Asia-Pacific achieves social protection milestone, yet challenges remain and new ones emerge with climate change](#)

**At AVPN, we view the relationship between faith and giving as a spectrum, encompassing a range of beliefs and values that shape individual and institutional actions.** In this brief, we adopt an inclusive approach to define "faith" as the body of beliefs, values, morals, and principles that inform decisions and behaviours. Faith-aligned giving complements conventional education methods by embedding deeper ethical and community-focused dimensions, enhancing learners' growth.

**Against this backdrop, we illustrate how these faith-aligned values manifest in practical action through the education programmes of three organisations deeply engaged in Asia's education sector, Dompot Dhuafa, Porticus, and Piramal Foundation. These case studies provide valuable insights into common values that drive meaningful change, offering replicable models for stakeholders seeking to enhance education outcomes.**



# KEY INSIGHTS

The following insights highlight the common values guiding the education programmes of these faith-aligned organisations, showcasing how their shared principles translate into meaningful impact:

- **Community-Centric and Holistic Approaches:** Faith-aligned givers often see education as a lifelong journey, one that must be sustained by addressing multiple aspects of livelihood and well-being. By situating education within this broader context, they ensure that students are not only equipped with academic knowledge but also supported in their personal and communal development, fostering a holistic approach to growth.
- **Socio-emotional Learning:** Emphasising the value of socio-emotional skills alongside academic skills, these programmes aim to nurture self-awareness and strengthen relationships. They focus on cultivating compassion as a core learning outcome, empowering students to build meaningful connections, make ethical decisions, and contribute actively to the well-being of those around them.
- **Service and Responsibility:** Faith-aligned education programmes often emphasise the importance of service and collective responsibility. By fostering a sense of duty towards one's community, these programmes position education as a tool for contributing to the common good. They encourage students to look beyond individual success, cultivating a deeper understanding of their role in addressing societal challenges.
- **Dignity:** By promoting education as a means of self-improvement and upliftment, faith-aligned initiatives aim to enhance individuals' dignity and life opportunities. Many of these programmes specifically support historically marginalised or underserved communities, using education to challenge inequities and restore agency, empowering individuals to reclaim their voice and dignity.

While many education initiatives focus on technical skills and workforce readiness, faith-aligned organisations add a values-driven dimension, framing education as a pathway to nurture character, empathy, and collective responsibility. This perspective enriches the broader ecosystem by highlighting education's ethical and community-rooted purpose. By showcasing practical models, this brief aims to inspire stakeholders to strengthen inclusive, quality education across Asia and forge partnerships that help every child realise their full potential.

The next section profiles Dompot Dhuafa, Porticus, and Piramal Foundation, providing tangible examples of how these values drive systemic change in Asia's education landscape.



# How Dompét Dhuafa Advances Education Through Islamic Giving

## Grantmaker and Implementing Organisation

Type of Funder

Indonesia

Country

1993

Year Established

Indonesia

Active in

Islam

Faith

Dompét Dhuafa is an Indonesian philanthropic organisation dedicated to alleviating poverty through social services, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. By leveraging Islamic financial instruments such as *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving), *waqf* (Islamic endowment funds), *hibah* (grants), and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity), Dompét Dhuafa blends faith-aligned giving with sustainable development strategies. As of 2024, it manages over IDR 223 billion (USD 13.8 million) in assets,<sup>6</sup> reflecting its effective management of Islamic philanthropic capital. While rooted in Islamic values of dignity, compassion, social justice, and equitable wealth distribution,<sup>7</sup> Dompét Dhuafa serves marginalised communities regardless of background, demonstrating the transformative potential of faith-based philanthropy in driving long-term, systemic change.

Read more about Dompét Dhuafa's approach to faith-based education and impact in the full case study.



<sup>6</sup> Dompét Dhuafa, 2022-2023, [Financial Statements for the Years Ended December 31, 2023 and 2022](#)  
<sup>7</sup> Dompét Dhuafa, n.d., [About Us](#)

# How Porticus Embeds Values in Education for Lasting Impact

<b>Grantmaker</b> Type of Funder	<b>Global</b> Country	<b>1995</b> Year Established	<b>In the education sector: Lebanon, Jordan, India, Bangladesh, Haiti, Peru, Brazil and Kenya</b> Active in	<b>Catholic values, but not primarily faith-led</b> Faith
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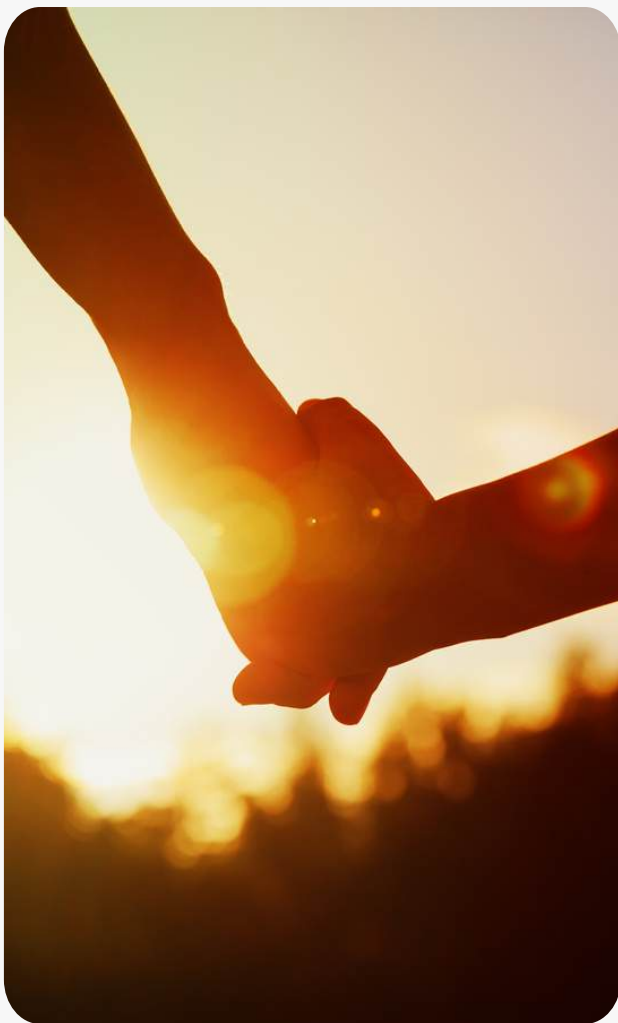
Porticus is a philanthropic organisation that aims to create a just and sustainable future where human dignity flourishes. The organisation advises and manages the private philanthropic funds of the Brenninkmeijer family business owners. Porticus works with over 1,000 partners worldwide in over 130 countries and supports numerous active programmes that address global challenges through evidence-based, locally informed solutions. Leveraging its local networks and knowledge, Porticus identifies the root causes of societal and environmental challenges to enable systems change that is inclusive, participatory and makes a difference in the long term. The philanthropic work of the Brenninkmeijer family business owners has always been rooted in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching – serving the common good and promoting human dignity and social justice. Inclusive, high-quality education is a critical ingredient for a just and dignified life. That is why Porticus designs and funds programmes that support communities to advance education. Its education initiatives in Asia follow a values-driven approach guided by subsidiarity, solidarity, and sustainability, blending systemic reform with local agency to create long-term, impactful change in education.

Learn more about Porticus' values-driven education strategy in the full case study.



# How Piramal Foundation Cultivates Compassion Through Systemic Education Reform

<b>Operating Foundation</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Hinduism / Sanatan Dharma</b>
Type of Funder	Country	Year Established	Active in	Faith



Piramal Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Piramal Group founded in 2011, is dedicated to addressing critical barriers to India's development through innovative, scalable solutions.<sup>8</sup> Guided by the value of *sewa bhaav* (selfless service), the Foundation focuses on education, health, climate, and economic empowerment, with a significant portion of its resources directed toward enhancing educational outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Its education initiatives prioritise compassion and Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning, moving beyond traditional literacy and numeracy to cultivate empathy and leadership as core competencies. Through leadership development, curriculum innovation, and strategic partnerships, the Piramal Foundation fosters systemic reform, demonstrating how compassion-driven approaches can create sustainable, long-term change in India's education landscape.

Explore how the Piramal Foundation integrates SEE Learning into systemic education reform in the full case study.

<sup>8</sup> Piramal, n.d., [Foundation](#)

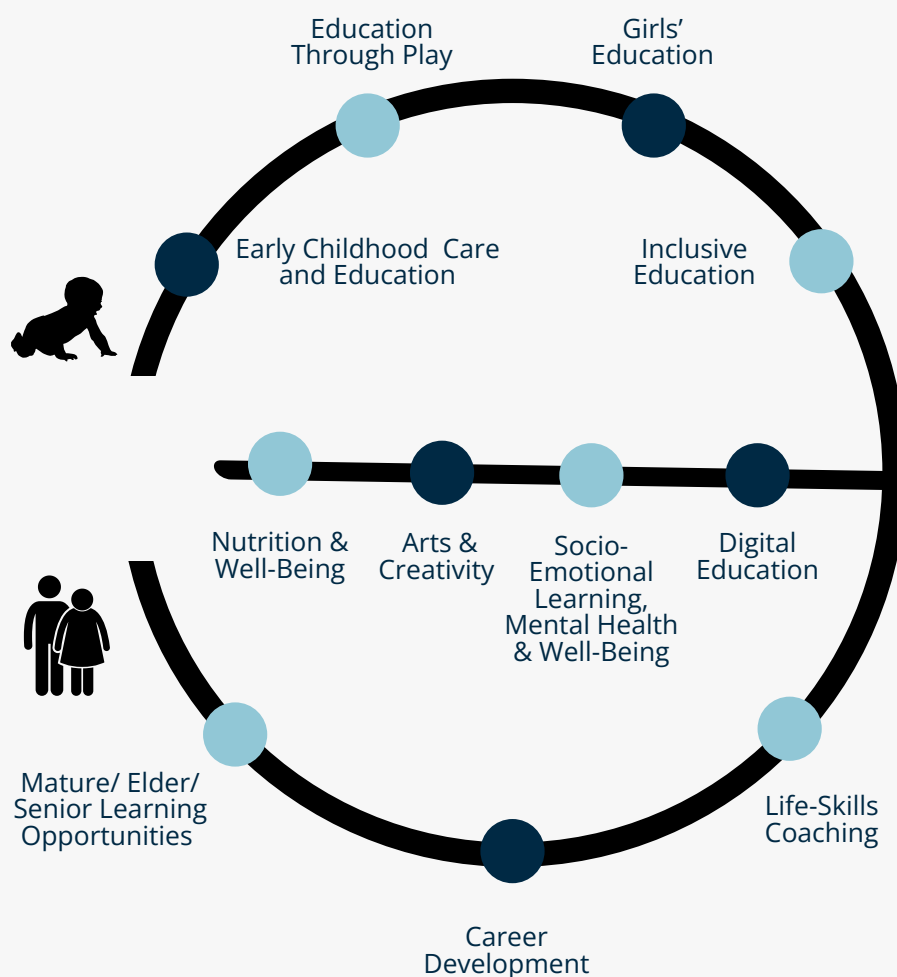
<sup>9</sup> The CSR Universe, 2022, [Piramal spends Rs 7 Cr on CSR projects including Healthcare & Education; Exceeds budget by Rs 79 lakh](#)



# PATHWAYS FOR PARTNERSHIP

If you are a funder or resource provider looking to strengthen education outcomes, the following offers a practical starting point. Beyond the three case studies, we have assembled a snapshot of organisations that deliver high-impact programmes across every stage of the learning lifecycle, from early childhood development to life-skills coaching for youth and adults.

Whilst not a comprehensive list, these examples illustrate how values such as compassion, service, and social justice can be translated into inclusive learning, socio-emotional development, and skills for the future. Each organisation brings tested approaches and collaborative financing models that emphasise transparency, accountability, and ease of partnership. Use this directory to identify potential allies, explore co-funding opportunities, or support specific interventions that align with your mission—turning the insights from this brief into concrete, values-aligned action on the ground.



### Early Childhood Education

*Developing foundational cognitive, social, and emotional skills in young children. Also known as Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) or Early Child Development (ECD).*

<b>Childfund International</b>	Childfund International is an independent 501(c)(3) development charity that curates and supports ECD and intervention programmes in partnership with Education Ministries and implementing organisations in South Asia and Southeast Asia, supporting parents and caregivers promote access to early learning environments and safe home and community environments.
<b>Pratham Education Foundation</b>	As one of the largest non-governmental organisations in India, Pratham Education Foundation conducts Learning Camps with a tailored “Teaching at the Right Level” (TaRL) approach for children aged 0-8, in various parts of India, utilising Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), local culturally-adapted resources and caregivers.
<b>Save The Children Asia Regional Office</b>	The UK-registered charity champions ECD programmes in 20+ countries in Asia including Bhutan, the Philippines and Bangladesh, to build children’s cognitive skills and encourage socio-emotional competences while ensuring their physical health and well-being.

### Education through Play

*Exploring concepts and solving problems through hands-on, game-based experiential learning. Also known as Play-Based Learning / Learning through Play (LtP).*

<b>Sesame Workshop India</b>	Sesame Workshop is a non-profit media and educational organisation whose “Play ‘N’ Learn” project has been providing digital-based learning in low-resourced classrooms to improve learning outcomes in India. The “Play. Connect. Learn” project also ensures children’s literacy through online games.
<b>Toybank</b>	Toybank is an implementing advocacy non-governmental organisation that champions the transformative health benefits of LtP for both children and adults. Toybank’s play-based learning initiatives improve emotional resilience, critical thinking, and teamwork skills among learners. Toybank’s initiative in play-based learning aims to develop learners’ skills to be creative, engaged, lifelong learners. The sessions are specially curated to encourage fun and stress-reduction.
<b>Save The Children Asia Regional Office</b>	Save the Children works with children’s sports clubs, pre-school teachers and parents throughout Asia to institutionalise the “Prescription to Play” (P2P) Project for children aged 0-3 years. The Project also helps caregivers gain knowledge in child development parenting.

## Girls' Education

*Breaking barriers to education for girls and addressing societal, financial, and gender-based challenges that hinder girls' access to education to ensure their successful progression through schooling.*

<b>Child Rights and You (CRY India)</b>	CRY is an implementing advocacy non-governmental organisation, whose "Girl Interrupted" Initiative aims to ensure that girls in India complete their education through public awareness campaigns that harness film production and poster production in public spaces. The initiative's creative approach sheds light on girls' lack of access to a complete education, and CRY's broader efforts in enrolling millions of girls in schools and keeping a high retention rate.
<b>Room to Read</b>	Room to Read is a non-profit organisation that runs a Girls' Education Program (GEP), which provides life skills education, individual mentorship, community engagement and material support for girls aged 6-12 years in Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia and Sri Lanka. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Room to Read expanded its reach globally through the "She Creates Change" online storytelling initiative, which engaged the life stories of girls from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Nepal, and India.
<b>Roots of Health (Ugat ng Kalusugan)</b>	Roots of Health (Ugat ng Kalusugan) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation which focuses on reproductive health education for youth in the Philippines. The curriculum's focus on puberty and HIV/AIDS addresses the gap left by the lack of formal reproductive health education in schools. Youth are also mobilised and trained to become advocates who spread knowledge about sexual health and contraception to their peers, helping the youth make informed decisions about their reproductive health and future.
<b>VVOB</b>	VVOB is an international non-profit organisation which has promoted gender-responsive education in Cambodia through the Teaching for Improved Gender Equality and Responsiveness (TIGER) project, which implements a gender-sensitive pedagogy through training educators and school leaders across 40 primary and secondary schools. Through addressing gender in language use and classroom set up, there has been a reduction in physical and emotional abuse.

## Inclusive Education

*Providing equitable access to education for all children, regardless of their physical or intellectual challenges, celebrating diversity across learners.*

<b>Perkins School for the Blind</b>	Perkins is an international non-governmental organisation which promotes inclusive education for children with visual impairments and complex disabilities in Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines and Vietnam. Perkins' International Educational Leadership Program empowers educators to create accessible resources and community-based initiatives that address the needs of children with disabilities.
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## Nutrition & Well-Being

*Ensuring that children have access to proper nutrition, leading to better cognitive performance, and overall health.*

### Akshaya Patra Foundation

Akshaya Patra Foundation is a non-profit organisation in India that runs the Mid-Day-Meal (MDM) Scheme which provides nutritious, cooked meals to children in government schools and Anganwadi centres (a rural childcare centre) in India, ensuring that children receive the nutrition they need to focus on learning and improve school attendance and retention.

### Child Rights and You (CRY India)

CRY ensures access to quality food, timely immunisations and essential healthcare for children in India. By supporting home-grown kitchen gardens and partnering with local healthcare centres, CRY aims to reduce malnourishment and mortality rates among children, ensuring their empowerment and access to a healthy start in life.

## Arts & Creative Education

*Fostering imagination, self-expression, and problem-solving, ultimately nurturing their emotional intelligence and broadening their worldviews.*

### Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)

BRAC is an international development organisation whose Creative Arts Programme (CAP) integrates performing and fine arts with lessons on sexual and reproductive health, psychosocial counselling and gender equity in secondary schools in Bangladesh. Under the CAP, art is used as a therapeutic tool by students to provide holistic adolescent development and decrease the secondary school dropout rate.

## Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)

*Helping children and youth develop emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, including self-awareness, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are essential for mental health and wellbeing as well as success, both socially and academically,*

### Childfund International

Through developing the Education for Protection and Well-being Model, which targets children aged 6-12, their teachers and their caregivers over a two-year period in schools in Sri Lanka, Childfund International focuses on enhancing teaching practices, positive parenting, and parental engagement in education to make learning a safe and success-inducing space for children.

### Labhya Foundation

Labhya Foundation is a non-profit organisation which co-creates a localised and culturally sensitive SEL and well-being curriculum with teacher trainers and partners with Indian state governments to co-create SEL and well-being programmes that are mandated and integrates across public schools. Labhya provides end-to-end support through co-creation of mindfulness and well-being curriculum, teacher capacity building, monitoring & evaluation, and support in effective implementation.

## Digital Education

*Improving access to learning resources and providing innovative tools that enhance the educational experience, especially for those in remote or underserved areas.*

<b>Kidspire Vietnam</b>	Kidspire, a non-profit organisation registered in Vietnam, provides online career seminars, science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) camps and Innovative Labs for orphanages throughout Vietnam.
<b>Knowledge Channel Foundation</b>	The Foundation is a non-governmental non-profit organisation which produces an online learning series called “MathDali” for students in the Philippines, including courses in Mathematics for Grade 1 students, and runs virtual courses on online safety and responsibility for parents, guardians and young people.
<b>Passérelles Numériques</b>	Passérelles Numériques is a non-profit organisation which provides free IT and soft skills training to vulnerable youth in Cambodia, Vietnam and Philippines. The training curriculum is adapted to each local context and industry needs, and accommodation, food, tuition and medical expenses are covered. The training concludes with an internship, and students usually find qualified employment soon after graduating.
<b>Solve Education!</b>	Solve Education! is a global technology non-profit organisation. Solve’s game app, which is designed for intermittent internet connectivity, enhances literacy and numeracy skills for learners from all socio-economic backgrounds in Indonesia. The app also provides courses on life skills and career development. App users can join a job-seeking platform, Solve Employment!, which enables them to practise the skills learnt in the real world.

## Life Skills Coaching

*Preparing youth with practical, everyday skills like communication, critical thinking, and financial literacy, ensuring that they invest in their personal development.*

<b>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)</b>	BRAC’s Creative Clubs explore the links between out-of-school time and lifelong learning skills development for early adolescent youth through play-based and experiential learning methodologies.
<b>PeaceCorps Youth Development (Thailand)</b>	PeaceCorps is an independent agency and program of the United States government that runs Youth in Development Projects in various Asian countries including Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia. The projects develop the lives and leadership skills of young people, to promote healthy engaged citizens through a combination of classes, clubs, community projects and leadership camps.
<b>Room to Read</b>	Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program (GEP) supports the development of critical life skills that support adolescents in and beyond the classroom through the life skills curriculum that is inspired by self-awareness, self-efficacy and social awareness.

### Career Development

*Helping individuals understand their strengths and interests while guiding them towards vocational training and career opportunities, ensuring they have the necessary tools to thrive in the workforce.*

<b>ActionAid</b>	Action Aid is an international non-governmental organisation that operates in West Asia. In Jordan, ActionAid has empowered the Mafraq Youth Hub to implement climate action activities in the city and receive vocational training for employment opportunities, while being given a platform to discuss how youth can navigate the rapidly changing urban landscape of Jordan.
<b>VVOB</b>	The non-profit works closely with governments, research institutions and national and regional networks in Cambodia and Vietnam to improve the quality of secondary technical and vocational education and training to align knowledge and skills imparted with the labour market and integrate entrepreneurship. Additionally, VVOB's "iPlay Project" trains primary school teachers and caregivers in Vietnam to integrate LtP into their pedagogies and learning environments through the existing in-service teacher professional development.

### Senior Learning Opportunities

*Providing opportunities for lifelong learning, skill development, and community engagement, empowering seniors to maintain active, healthy, and meaningful lives.*


<b>Essence Hub (Hong Kong)</b>	The social enterprise operates under the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong and provides preventive care and promoting a healthy and meaningful lifestyle for people aged 50 and above in Hong Kong. Rooted in the belief of conserving the wisdom of older generations, the enterprise offers stretching exercises, smartphone usage skills, homemade baking and soap making classes and eco-tourism in Hong Kong.
<b>HelpAge India</b>	HelpAge India is a non-profit organisation that provides health and financial services, raise awareness about ageing issues, and advocate for the rights and well-being of older adults. HelpAge India drives initiatives in agricultural and livestock-rearing skills as a way of maintaining health and productivity among the elderly.
<b>ProAge - Living Ageing Well</b>	The Singapore-based social enterprise organises the "Go For Your Mountain" Initiative which promotes physical vitality in older age, and the "You're Precious" movement which offers free resources and workshops for caregivers and frontliners who provide essential care to the elderly, aiming to support those who are often overlooked in the caregiving process.





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