



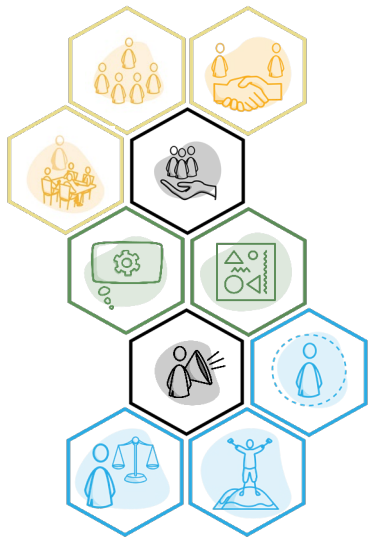
Jesuit Worldwide Learning  
Higher Education at the Margins

## Research Report

#08 / March 2023

# Nurturing Inner Peace to Promote More Peaceful Communities

## The Peace Leader programme



This report presents the research findings of the impact study of the Peace Leader programme, a 6-month blended learning professional programme, accredited by Hekima Institute of Peace studies and International Relations (Kenya) and International Relations and delivered by Jesuit Worldwide Learning. Through the analysis of graduates' voices, this research shows the personal transformation and the growth of a critical, intercultural and interreligious mindset developed during the Peace Leader programme, resulting in the building of inner peace within graduates and adoption of servant leadership, as graduates are more than ever committed to the peace and wellbeing of their communities.

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# 1 Introduction

The Peace Leader programme, delivered by Jesuit Worldwide Learning and accredited by the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations, Hekima University College (Kenya), since 2019, is a 24-week, blended learning course on peace and leadership studies. By the end of 2022, the course had been delivered 9 times to a total of 522 participants in 32 community learning centres in 10 different countries. Currently, 252 young people have graduated from the programme; in this research we have analysed the voices of graduates that completed the programme before September 2021 (n.171).

The Peace Leader programme is delivered in a blended learning mode. The course content is accessible in a web-based training platform, the JWL Learning Management System (the Humanitarian e-Learning Platform - HelP) or in the JWL Global E-learning app, which offers to download the content in offline settings. Throughout the course, students must submit weekly assignments designed according to the experience - reflection - action model, which is core to the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (ICAGE, 1993). Assignments often invite students to share their experience in a global community of learners, bringing students together from different community learning centres in a virtual global classroom. As part of this exchange, students are invited to reflect on their experience and apply their learning takeaways in 5 project works throughout the programme. These projects, composed of activities engaging with local leaders and communities, encourage students to apply their knowledge into

their relevant context and to contribute to their community. Throughout their journey in the Peace Leader programme, students are guided by an online facilitator, an expert in the disciplinary field, who has responsibility for providing academic guidance by giving online feedback and grading each student. Students also benefit from local support, as an onsite facilitator is in charge of facilitating the onsite discussion twice weekly in the community learning centre. Through these meetings, students are encouraged to discuss relevant topics with their classmates in the centre and to recognise the relevance of the course content in their local context. Therefore, students are accompanied in their learning journey, benefiting from both online and onsite support as well as a global and local student community.

## 1.1 Country Profiles

This section briefly presents the sites where the graduates who participated in the research studied: Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya, Malawi and India.

Kakuma Refugee Camp is situated in a semi-arid area in the North of Kenya, near the South Sudanese and Ugandan border. Established in 1992, Kakuma hosts refugees from all the conflicts around Kenya: Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Great Lakes region. With more than 150,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan and Somalia, it is the second biggest refugee camp in Kenya and one of the oldest and longstanding refugee camps in the world. JWL began implementing the first pilot online programme in Kakuma Camp in 2010. Today, Kakuma is the biggest JWL centre, welcoming over 1,500 students since 2020 for 3 academic programmes, 6



professional certificates and 5 English courses.

Dzaleka Refugee Camp, just forty kilometres outside the Malawian capital city, Lilongwe, was the second pilot site for the Diploma in Liberal Studies, the first programme offered by JWL. The camp dates back to 1995 to host Mozambican refugees and was set up in a former high-security prison. When the refugees from Mozambique returned home, new refugees from conflicts in the Great Lakes region were hosted in Dzaleka. From 1,000 habitants at that time, it developed to a camp akin to a rural city of mud houses, hosting over 30,000 refugees, mainly from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since 2020, about 1,250 young adults in a community learning centre follow their courses every day, connecting with the rest of the world,

changing their outlook on life and that of the whole community.

Bamyán and Herat in Afghanistan saw new JWL community learning centres open in 2015, run by New Horizon, as local partner. Bamyán is a small town in the central mountainous part of Afghanistan. Students came from as far as a one-day journey from the neighbouring Daikundi Province to attend the English Language programme and to join the higher education programme. The first graduates belonging to the Hazara community returned to their villages in the Daikundi and Gore Provinces and opened new learning centres, teaching English and enabling some to study professional and academic courses with JWL.

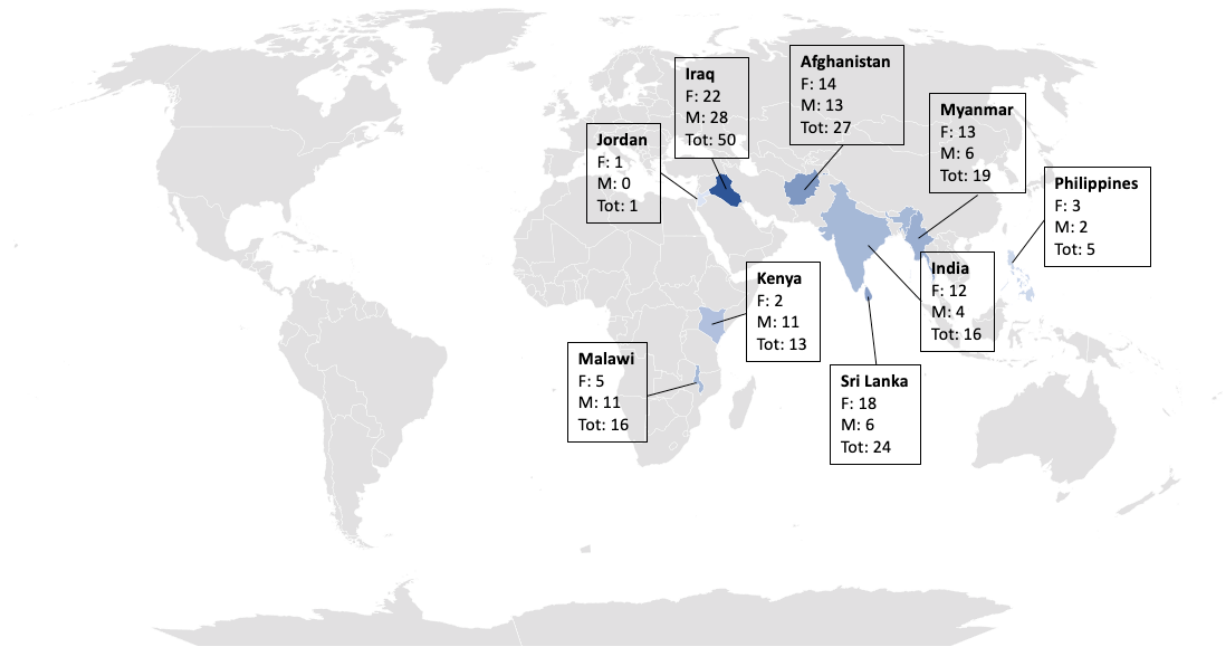


Figure 1: Map of Peace Leader Graduates until September 2021



Iraq became a more recent focus of JWL from the end of 2016. The Syrian war and the ISIS invasion of the Sinjar Mountains, Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, displaced hundreds of thousands of Syrians, Yezidis and Iraqi Christians, who found protection in the refugee camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the cities of Dohuk and Erbil. JWL began with a small learning centre in Domiz Camp, housed in two containers, and one group of students meeting at the Catholic University in Erbil. In Khanke Camp, hosting over 20,000 Yezidis, the English Language programme was the first programme on offer, later followed by the higher education programme. The JWL community in Iraq includes all religious and cultural

communities, Syrians, Muslims, Yezidis and Iraqi Christians. The first graduates in Erbil (2019) moved back to their hometowns and, like their colleagues in Afghanistan, opened two JWL community learning centres in Qaraqosh and Bartella (Christian communities). Likewise, students and first graduates of the Yezidi community in Khanke Camp moved back to their hometown in Sinjar and opened a new community learning centre to continue their own studies and to reach out to the youth of a very deprived and traumatised community. Since 2020, close to 4,000 students have been enrolled in JWL courses across Iraq.



Figure 2: Group discussion during an onsite meeting in Iraq



India is also part of a recent growth in JWL, as two new centres, one in New Delhi, and one in Anchuthengu (Kerala), were established in recent years. The Delhi centre, in collaboration with the Jesuit Refugee Service, has welcomed mostly Afghan or Myanmar refugee students since 2020. The centre in Anchuthengu, in partnership with the Sneharam Center for Social Action and Research, offers studies across a range of academic professional courses, mostly to young adults coming from the fishing community and lower castes.

## 1.2 Research Design

This research follows a consolidated research design used for evaluating the impact of JWL programmes (Honen-Delmar & Rega, 2021), based on a participatory approach (Hall, 1992) and aimed at fostering transformation in the organisation and in the research team. The interview protocol was adapted from the one conceived to investigate the impact of the Diploma in Liberal Studies (Honen-Delmar & Rega, 2021) and was based on a participatory workshop conducted with key stakeholders within the organisation, which led to identifying six fundamental impact dimensions: critical thinking, leadership, empowerment, self-confidence, sense of community and intercultural and interreligious sensitivity. The semi-structured interview protocol, was structured as follows:

- An initial section to identify what happened in graduates' lives after the Peace Leader programme.
- A section examining the learning journey and the changes it produces.
- A section studying the 6 identified dimensions, focused on capturing how the graduates define these

dimensions and concrete examples in graduates' lives. and their involvement in the community.

- A section exploring the societal impact and the involvement in the community of the graduates.
- A section to capture the dimensions graduates deem the most important in terms of impact in their lives.
- A final section identifying any possible negative outcomes and undesired impacts the Programme had in the lives of graduates and their communities.

Country	Site	No. of interviews
<b>Afghanistan</b>	Bamyan	1
	Bandar	4
	Herat	3
<b>Kenya</b>	Kakuma	4
<b>India</b>	Sneharam	4
	Delhi	3
<b>Iraq</b>	Domiz	3
	Erbil	1
	Khanke	4
<b>Malawi</b>	Dzaleka	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>

Table 2: Participants by country and community learning centres

In line with JWL's transformational approach to research, this project was an opportunity to work on the capacity building of JWL students and graduates; therefore, we selected research assistants to conduct interviews in Dzaleka Refugee Camp (Malawi), Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) and in Delhi (India), as well as in





Iraq. The research assistants attended a 1-day online training course on data collection and research ethics and the international research team met each week to report progresses and challenges, as well as create a peer-learning environment, leading to building a community of practice during the data collection period.

Country	Male	Female
Afghanistan	3	5
Kenya	3	1
India	2	5
Iraq	5	3
Malawi	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>

Table 3: Participants' gender by country

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was used to analyse the data with the help of the Dedoose software. To structure the report, we aimed to keep a representation of all the sites in which interviews were conducted when selecting the quotes to include in the presentation of the findings. The two main limitations of the research design have been already mentioned in Honen-Delmar & Rega (2021), and refer in primis to the nature of the research, which is commissioned by JWL itself and conducted by JWL staff (the Global Research Team). This may have inhibited the ability of participants to express themselves fully, and to report possible negative impacts of the programme in their lives. Secondly, although all interviewers had the same training, the heterogenous group of interviewers may have had different approaches to some

questions, which could have resulted in emphasising some aspects more than others during the interview.

### 1.3 Report Structure

Analysis of the interviews identifies two main outcomes of the course on students: The course's core consequences are that it helps students find inner peace and leads them to act in building peace in their communities. These two outcomes are cultivated by three key effects on students through participation on the course:

- A different relationship graduates have with themselves, which we call personal transformation. This is related to the process promoted by the course of embarking on a journey of self-discovery that makes graduates become more aware and in control of themselves, ultimately leading to gaining self-confidence. The development results in a different way of being, as explored in chapter 2.
- A different mindset that is embedded in the adoption of forms of critical, intercultural and interreligious thinking. Together, they have a significant effect on how graduates rationalise, make decisions and how they comprehend and act towards people who are different from them. This results in development of a different way of thinking, as revealed in chapter 3.

Development of the self and of a different mindset are direct effects of the course promoting an inner transformation in graduates. A transformation of how they behave and think, which ultimately helps them achieve inner peace, as illustrated in chapter 4. This enables them to acquire



attitudes and behaviours of servant leaders with the intention of building peace in their community; namely by exerting humility, active listening, problem-solving skills and projecting them as role models, as presented in chapter 5.

Ultimately, this report is a journey in the transformation of the relationship graduates have with themselves and with their community, leading to the achievement of inner peace and to the promotion of acts of community peacebuilding.

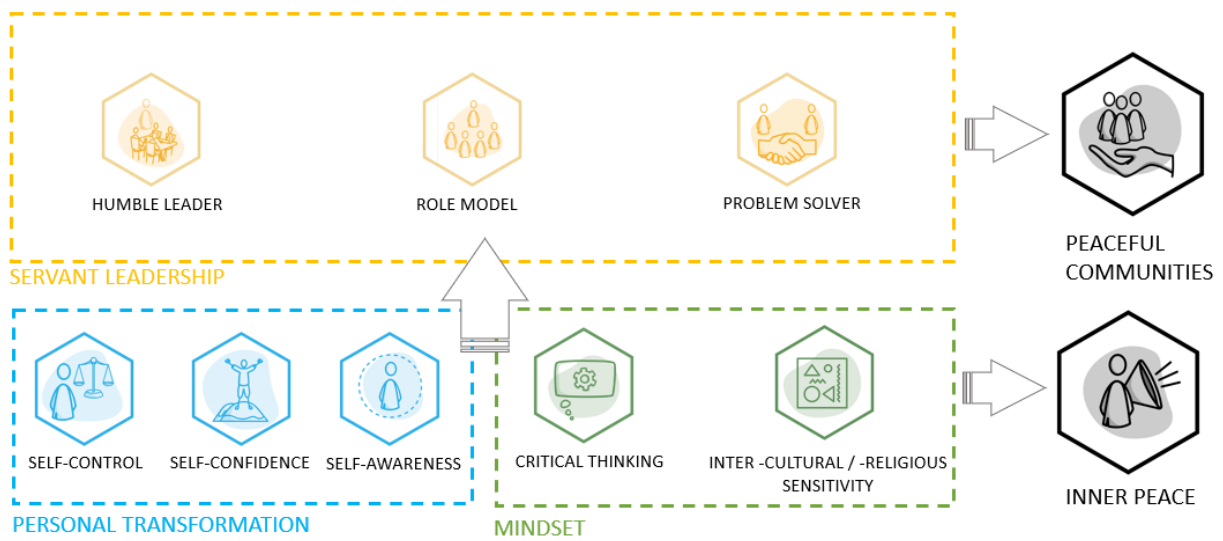


Figure 3: The conceptual model





## 2 Personal Transformation



“The course [...] changed my attitude towards life. Fortunately, I can say that now I’m more compassionate for that. I’m a more compassionate husband to my wife, I’m a more compassionate son to my father, and I’m a more compassionate citizen to my people. So, the course changed me in a very positive way.”

– AF\_PL\_G21\_F

The above quote relates to a sentiment shared by almost all graduates interviewed, showing that taking the Peace Leader programme led them to experience a positive transformation. That is, graduates state that having gone through the programme led to a change in their relationships with themselves. This is usually related to enhanced self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-control and, therefore, increased self-confidence. The chapter will focus on more specific ways in which this personal transformation takes place and leads to the development of inner peace. It will show that discovering, understanding, accepting and controlling themselves cumulatively leads to an increase in graduates’ perception of their self-worth and capability.

### 2.1 Self-awareness

A core element in the interviews is the theme of self-awareness, which is raised throughout the course and in many different perspectives. Mostly, the course promotes the exercise of understanding oneself and how to behave and be perceived in diverse situations. Awareness is defined in the units as “openness to sensing, perceiving, feeling and learning”, to promote an engagement with the premise that self-awareness relates not only to what one knows about themselves, but also to consciousness of how they are seen by others. In the course’s first 7 weeks, students learn how their circumstances influence the perspectives they have of themselves and their world, how they behave in conflict situations, how to listen and connect to themselves, as well as the importance of self-care, etc. These lessons are mostly transmitted through concepts, analogies and exercises that the graduates usually recalled during interviews.

Through definitions of self-awareness provided by graduates themselves during interviews, we can see the influence of these lessons; one graduate defines self-awareness as “the inner understanding of oneself” (KK\_PL\_G2\_J); another graduate mentions “I found something in my shadow that I was ignoring” (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A), which reflects this introspective movement of self-comprehension. Furthermore, this is taken by graduates as a necessary step for changing their outlook on themselves and, in fact, concepts and exercises presented during the programme, such as the Johari



Window<sup>1</sup>, are brought up by graduates as they reflect on how they were pushed to explore parts of themselves that were unknown to them and they come to comprehend and accept those aspects (IQK\_PL\_G2\_N), which ultimately helped in accepting faults or the “bad you” (AH\_PL\_G22\_F). This self-acceptance is also taken as a necessary step towards inner peace and is deeply related to self-awareness and the exercise of digging into your shadow for more self-knowledge.

Through this exercise, an important aspect of personal transformation is highlighted: **accepting and embracing one’s faults.** As one graduate in Afghanistan states:

*“... before taking the course, I did not have a very good relationship or relation with my anxiety, worry and stress. Whenever I had a big presentation, I had a lot of anxiety and I had a lot of stress and worry, but [...] I wanted to show people that I didn't have anxiety; I wanted to show people that I didn't have worry. After taking the course, I got to realize that these are our feelings and you have to own these feelings; they are part of us. I learned from the course that [...] there is not such a thing as perfect, [...] the most complete person is the one who accepts all his feelings [...]. See this is the impact of the course in my life; nowadays, when I have a big interview or when I have a big speech in front of people, I don't want to show people that I don't have anxiety because I now have a good relationship with my anxiety. With pride, I can tell others at the beginning of my speech that [I am] proud, I can with pride [...] I can tell others that I have anxiety,*

*my hands are kind of shaking because I have learned that I have to own, they are my feelings, they are part of me.” (AH\_PL\_G21\_F)*

It is through this process of putting the self first and embarking on this journey of exploring and accepting unknown parts of themselves, that the personal transformation experience takes place (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD, IQD\_PL\_G2\_A). Graduates also acknowledge accounts of the intricate emotions that this journey evokes in students. For instance, a graduate in India states:

*In each unit, problems were arising inside of me because it's peeling my inner self. It's feeling very difficult because every time I think like this [...] it's disturbing. [...] We have a pickle, a bitter experience in our life and every time we take the bottle open and take a little bit, take the taste and then close it. [...] So, after doing this course, I collapsed this bigger bottle and I'm very free and I am taking decisions and saying something to others. I cannot judge anything for I am doing my own work. Nothing affects me because I have a character [...] So how to handle our feelings? Peace leader mostly helps like that. Who is entering in a conflict? We have some inner shadows<sup>2</sup>, yeah. So that mostly comes in conflicts, so when a conflict has happened, our energy model will come and I understand that and I am dealing with that inner model; now I am peaceful and smiley.” (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD)*

**Although all graduates reflect on the positive outcomes of this, at times, uncomfortable process, some graduates**

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<sup>1</sup>The Johari Window: An analogy, which takes the form of a window and is composed by four areas: (1) the public self, which represents what both you and others know about yourself, (2) the blind self, which is what you don't know about yourself but others do, (3) the hidden self, which are the aspects of yourself known to you but not to others, (4) and the unknown or shadow self, which are the things about yourself that neither you nor others know. In its operation, the Johari window dictates that individuals should strive to make the area of public self bigger; in turn, making the other three areas smaller, to signify the movement of aspects of the self into individual and public consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> Inner Shadow: Personal aspects that the self is embarrassed about. However, it is emphasised that change can never fully happen if the shadow is only suppressed, ignored, it must be accepted and seen in a positive light.



still state that it would have been essential for them to have psychological accompaniment. The presence of a mental health professional available for individual counselling was a suggestion by graduates for further implementation of the course. In India, one graduate stated, for example:

*"Every student needs a counsellor; they have mental issues, personal issues and we want to share." (INS\_PL\_G3\_MHD)*

At the same time, graduates also reflect that concepts and exercises taught in the programme help them in this journey of expanding their self-awareness and dealing with adversities they may encounter. For instance, this graduate in India further reflects on the centrality of the notion of introspection in the Peace Leader programme, and also mentions how some practices learned help them continue on that route:

*"Everything we are taught, such as who am I? What do I live with? [...] What is the wish of mine so that type of thoughts is coming? Throughout the course, those are the questions. And another thing, whenever confidence decreases, [...] I practice the four breathing, presencing practice<sup>3</sup> a lot. Like I already said, I am not religious, I am spiritual; it has helped me a lot." (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD)*

In that sense, these core concepts of the course become a way for students to work on their perceptions of themselves and, as shown, are carried beyond the classroom. This introspection allows graduates to reflect on the idea of peace, as some graduates reported that they let go of a

previous notion that peace is something that must be given to you; instead, they learned that the principle of peace is something that must first be constructed within, individually. This is exemplified by a graduate from Afghanistan:



**"I believed that someone should bring peace for us but during the course I learned that, first, I have to have peace with myself. I have to accept my own darkness, my own strengths and then, after I come to know myself well, I can bring peace. And that peace I have learned from myself, I kind of spread to others in the society."**

*-AH\_PL\_G22\_F*

The above quote reveals a further, more relational, consequence which self-awareness tends to develop. As stated by the graduate, self-awareness and inner peace, once achieved, then unfolds to others and is spread out into society. That rationale comes about in two ways, both in terms of understanding and relating to others, as well as bringing about change. Graduates say that it is only in understanding themselves that they can truly look at others (KK\_PL\_G9\_J, IQE\_PL\_G1\_A). Thus, for graduates, being truly able to understand others is only possible once self-understanding has also been achieved, which comprehends a

<sup>3</sup> Four-Breath Presencing Practice: Breathing technique to centre the self in order to be prepared and present in the moment and holistically consider yourself and others. It consists of taking four deep, conscious and consistent breaths that encompass first "our oneness", and then progressively expand "to those we love, to those we are in a relationship with, to all that is". It therefore aims to enhance internal and external awareness and consideration.



notion of how essential self-awareness is for graduates as a basis for all of their behaviours.

As related, therefore, self-awareness and the promotion of searching within oneself in order to enhance self-understanding is an important part of the Peace Leader programme and one that every graduate goes through. Consequently, graduates state that they become better able to accept themselves, understand others and feel confident and inspired enough to promote further change in their close circle and, eventually, towards their broader society. Another aspect of personal transformation, however, is the development of self-control, as graduates relate regarding their ability to handle inner conflict and react calmly to external adversity. This is explored in the next section.

## 2.2 Self-control

Graduates articulated how gaining self-control ultimately helped in dealing with inner conflict:

*"It taught me how to deal with inner conflict and just like to transfer from conflict to peace, internally. It was something great for me because, like now, I can, you know, control my feelings, I can manage how to deal with conflicts, whether its internal or external." (IQK\_PL\_G1\_M)*

The course helped graduates feel more in control of their feelings and thoughts, which was also characterised in the interviews as a positive transformation towards patience. For instance, in Malawi, a graduate stated:

*"... it impacted me with the knowledge of judging myself before reacting [...]. Before Peace Leader, I was just a man who was involved in some of the conflicts in the community, especially when I was at the pitch. So, I was being involved in the*

*failure to control, in those kinds of conflicts and arguments, because of failure. I mean, failure to control oneself." (MD\_PL\_G3\_P)*

In this instance of transformation, some graduates changed their way of communication and deviated from getting riled and easily reacting. In Iraq, for example, one graduate argues there are two types of communication: "You stay stable and learn to answer them in a way that will calm them down" or "being louder and more aggressive than them" (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M).

He stated that the course taught him how to always achieve calmness and being in control before answering anybody. The same graduate, in fact, relates that in their onsite meetings, their facilitator would always start the lessons with a yoga session or breathing exercises. Initially, the graduate did not see the point of these practices but then realised how helpful they could be and ended up adopting yoga into their lives and repeating some exercises they learned whenever they felt themselves getting angry (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M). Meditation, in fact, is recurrently referred to by the graduates as an exercise they learned from the course and have adopted beyond it (AH\_PL\_G22\_F; AH\_PL\_G18\_F; IQK\_PL\_G1\_M). In this sense, some graduates even define empowerment through the ability to handle oneself. For instance, one graduate in India states:

*"Empowerment is to have control, good management and command internally and externally, both in your inner world and also in the real world, very calmly" (ID\_PL\_G1\_Z).*

In graduates' journeys, self-awareness and self-control are related, enabling them to manage both internal and external conflict and adversity calmly and effectively.





Figure 4: Peace Leader students in Iraq practicing meditation in onsite meetings

In turn, as the last quote highlighted, this is a process which helps graduates in gaining self-confidence and feeling empowered. Further exploration of the ways in which self-confidence arises as a consequence of the course follows.

### 2.3 Self-confidence

Almost all of the graduates strongly relate the experience of having taken the Peace Leader programme to a significant increase in their self-confidence. One of the graduates defined self-confidence as “believe[ing in] what you do and believe[ing in] what you say” (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A), reflecting a notion of self-confidence as believing in one’s capacity to act or to one’s self worth, which is often related to communication skills. Although increased

self-confidence was a consequence of the programme for the vast majority of graduates, two graduates state they already had high self-confidence before the course or that the process of becoming more critical made them realise they might have been overconfident before (ID\_PL\_G1\_Z; IQD\_PL\_G3\_A), which can be linked to increased self-awareness.

In general, graduates describe self-confidence gained through the programme in relation to acknowledging their capacity to perform their roles, often expressed in their professional sphere. In Afghanistan, for example, a graduate stated:

*“[...] this course helped me to increase my self-esteem and self-confidence; before that, like, I thought I’m not able to do many things; [...] as an example, I thought [...] I’m not eligible to somehow apply for jobs with international NGOs because, before studying this course, I didn’t work with international NGOs. After, this helped me to go ahead and to apply for international organisations as an employee, so I applied and I passed interviews and the exam. [...] for the end I work with [...] JRS and that could help me actually, yes.” (AH\_PL\_G18\_F)*

The most common definition of self-confidence presented by the graduate is one that relates to their ability for expression, to being able to believe and transmit opinions (ID\_PL\_G3\_Z; KK\_PL\_G6\_G; INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD; KK\_PL\_G9\_J). This is taken as a source of self-empowerment, as being confident in their way to communicate allows them to socialise and to express their opinions freely, as well as learn to deal with the times in which they are contested (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M; MD\_PL\_G9\_P). For instance, one graduate in Afghanistan explained self-confidence as:

*“If she is talking in front of a number of people, and when he or she does not have the fear to talk,*



or when he is not shaking so, [...] and he can explain the words and the sentences that he wants to say with no obstacle, this is called self-confidence." (AB\_PL\_G19\_F)

Therefore, losing the fear of expressing themselves here, independent of who they are talking to or of their prior knowledge of that person, comes across as their notion of being confident.

In this sense, graduates also talked about how being in the classroom helped them in gaining self-confidence by expressing themselves in front of their course mates. For instance, a graduate in Kenya states:

*"The course helped me a lot to become confident because when I joined this course, I met different people and our facilitators always encouraged you to participate in the class, whereby it enabled*

## Self-confidence and the Practicum

It is interesting to note that going through the experience of the practicum is, for many graduates (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M; IQK\_PL\_G1\_M; AB\_PL\_G8\_F), an important step towards achieving self-confidence. The practicum is a part of the Peace Leader programme that consists of conducting interviews with wise elders who students have access to in their communities. In this sense, the experience of conducting interviews is named by graduates as helpful; especially, talking to people who are respected in their communities leads them to see how they are capable of effectively communicating with anybody. As put by a graduate in Iraq:

"We had in the course practical interviews where you would have to interview people, maybe three or more with the wise elders, or the leaders in the community. So I was going to the interviews and I was asking the questions and that helped me with what to say, what to ask, what to answer, and then there was also... I learned when to speak. Mostly before when I was talking, I was not really very confident; then I would sometimes be nervous but after the course I was more empowered and more encouraged to talk in public. At the same time, it helps others to also talk so when I was in high school in college and in the fourth year with my friends and my students, I would now like to reach out to students who were also shy. So, I learned and had the ability to empower them when talking and to encourage them, [...] Before, if I did not say the word correctly or anything, I would just keep silent and say I have done a big mistake but, in the course, we learn that things like that happen and its natural and try to keep on." (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M).

Here, then, we see an example of how the practicum helped a graduate increase their self-confidence, self-acceptance and general belief in their capacity to interact well with others.





*me to become confident because I stand in front of my colleagues to give my ideas and views. Yeah, and this is what makes me confident in front of people; [...] I should know I'm a confident person when I talk to her in a good way without becoming shy." (KK\_PL\_G5\_G)*

Therefore, the encouragement of participation in class leads to building self-confidence for students (AB\_PL\_G19\_F; MD\_PL\_G3\_P). In particular, the practicum was also named as helpful by graduates in gaining self-confidence, as expanded in the box above.

Most graduates also relate feeling less shy after the course and having enough confidence to express themselves freely in any situation. For instance, a graduate in Iraq stated:

*"I was closed-minded, I think, and introvert, but it did help me to get this power to meet people and to speak more and, at least, tell my ideas, you know. I had big ideas sometimes but I couldn't express them, I couldn't tell them to anyone but this helped me to at least get them out to people." (IQD\_PL\_G1\_N)*

Many other graduates (AB\_PL\_G8\_F; AB\_PL\_G5\_F; IQK\_PL\_G3\_M) also state that the course helped them move from shyness to easily communicating and socialising with people around them, which therefore made positive changes to their personal relationships and in their community.

Graduates also mention how recognition from people close to them has changed, and helps them to increase their self-worth, even legitimising their new behaviours and roles in that close circle. For instance, one graduate in Iraq mentions:

*"My mother does not really understand these topics, but I told her that I'm a peace leader, [...] and she was very proud. Sometimes, when I tried to solve this conflict in our family, she would always just look at me and smile like she believes something is going on, that I'm doing something. I think she recognised it. I was ignoring some of my friends, somehow not ignoring but not having the confidence to get close to them; I recognise that changed when I started to talk and express these ideas and believe in them and we became really close." (IQD\_PL\_G1\_N)*

In many cases, this also meant that graduates started to think more positively. In India, one graduate states:



**"Peace Leader course changed me mentally from a negative thinker to a positive thinker. Before learning this course, I always thought negatively and started fights with everyone; no one liked me but, after this course, I completely changed my behaviour."**

– ID\_PL\_G3\_Z

Therefore, achieving this increased level of self-confidence and having this personal change recognised and legitimised by others made graduates surer of their professional, social and communication skills and of their ability to perform the role of peace leader. Together, this led them to cultivate a more positive outlook on their lives, to strive for more ambitious professional positions, to generally expand their social circle and to be more comfortable with sharing their opinions and making independent decisions.



## Gender Lens: Female graduates gaining self-confidence and independence

One interesting and noticeable trend amongst interviews conducted with female graduates was that increased self-confidence for them was often related to overcoming certain gender norms and moving towards independence. For instance, some female graduates stress that having more confidence meant that they feel as comfortable talking to men as they do to women after the course (KK\_PL\_G2\_J). However, in this sense, a specific interview from Afghanistan deserves more focused attention. A 26-year-old female graduate reflects on how the course gave her independence, as well as the trust and confidence to make decisions based on her own opinions. She says:

"It helped me to be empowered; for example, when I was going to start something before, I was asking my friends or others or my family to help me. Now, it's easy for me to make the decision to start or to do something [...] If we do something without the help or without the support of others, we can call it empowerment." (AB\_PL\_G5\_F)

This independence in decision-making, furthermore, is intrinsically related to her gender, as she states that before the course, she was not allowed to leave the house by herself for a long time, or to work with men. She relates:

"I was not able to talk to men very comfortably; I was not comfortable when I was talking to them but now it's not a problem for me to talk to anyone, whether it's a man or a woman. Now I'm attending different programs, workshops, training and these things. Before, when I was referring to someone I didn't know, I was feeling afraid. I don't feel afraid of anything." (AB\_PL\_G5\_F)

This, is her sign of self-confidence for the graduate; to be able to "do anything I want [...] I can go to any countries, cities, and provinces without anyone and also face different people without any stress" (AB\_PL\_G5\_F). In this sense, her confidence tied to her gender in as much the independence she achieved are related to not depending on peers or being conscious of relating to men because of the confidence the course helped her with.



A further interesting consequence of gaining self-confidence demonstrated by one graduate was that it made them more comfortable owning their identity as a refugee:

*"I was trying to hide a characteristic that I thought will be not good for me. But, after the course, I decided to show whatever I am. I mean, especially at the beginning, I was trying to avoid telling people I'm a refugee when I saw people for the first time; for example [...], I wasn't mentioning that I'm refugee because I was thinking that they have a bad idea about refugees. No matter what I did, in general they have a kind of bad idea [...] Really, the one thing that relieved me in the work, like, I wasn't worried anymore about who am I? Who are... Oh, I am what?" (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A)*

Therefore, as is starkly demonstrated in this case, generally, gaining self-confidence helped graduates to be more comfortable in their skin and own their

skills and personalities, especially in relation to how they behave towards others.

In this sense, self-confidence involves a process of introspection for a lot of graduates. It starts from striving for self-acceptance or believing "in that small voice in your head," and to "feel comfortable sharing them because, once you've shared them, it would just make you more relaxed and it will make a huge change in your life" (IQD\_PL\_G1\_N). This transformation is intrinsically linked to first accepting and learning about yourself, which together leads to self-acceptance and self-control and can be cumulatively attributed to gaining self-confidence (INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD).



Figure 5: Practicing self-confidence in Iraq



In addition, many graduates also relate that having recognised the benefits of increased self-confidence motivates them to pass on that attitude to others around them, with many examples of graduates who are now teachers trying to cultivate their students' confidence. In Afghanistan, one states:

*"After I got to realise that I can own my anxiety, I can own my studies and I can own my worry, believe it or not, self-confidence comes to you automatically now I can talk with everyone [...], because I have a good friendship with my worry, I can tell everyone without shame, [...] that I'm worried because I'm a human being, everyone has worry. If students realise that everyone in this world has anxiety, [...] I showed them that I, as an English teacher with a lot of experience, still have anxiety and worries and your worries and your anxieties shouldn't stop you, [...] you need to work on your worries, you need to be friends with your worries. After explaining these*

*things, every one of my students was really interested to come and give their presentation because their worries and anxieties were kind of understood. They saw a teacher in the class who understood or who could understand their worries, who could understand them, who could understand their stress and this helps my students a lot to gain self-confidence."*  
(AH\_PL\_G21\_F)

In this sense, it becomes apparent not only what the graduates took from the Peace Leader course in terms of the importance of self-understanding and accepting but also that they are striving to transmit those values to others around them. This highlights the ways in which the course generally changed graduates' mindsets as it affected not only their way of relating to themselves but also to what they find important to transmit to others.





### 3 Mindset

As argued in the previous chapter, a significant portion of the Peace Leader programme is devoted to the development of personal transformation in students, in the extent to which they are pushed in exercises that aim at enhancing their self-awareness, which leads students to accepting themselves, feeling in control of themselves and, ultimately, being more self-confident. Inherently, the described process is very introspective and personal, involving a change in the graduate's relationship to themselves. In parallel, graduates reflect a change in their self-perception; this consequence is also heavily influenced by a second development promoted by the programme: a broader change in the graduates'

mindset and how they approach both thinking and acting with others.

The intricacies of this mindset development are put forward by a graduate in Kenya, who states:

*"[...] we were taught how to handle people from different backgrounds and how to understand yourself. First of all, before you handle a situation and handle people, you have to know more about yourself, who you are and, from there, when you know who you are, you also try to look at the conflict, how conflict erupts, how conflict is handled and how conflict is mitigated? Then you arrive in a situation needing to find how to bring peace or coexistence amongst people, amongst a community, amongst all people. These are some of the core factors or points we have so far learned during our journey on the course."  
(KK\_PL\_G9\_J)*



Figure 6: Onsite meetings of Peace Leader students in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya



This quote evidences first the embeddedness of the personal transformation described in the first chapter to graduates but it also mentions other developments promoted by the Peace Leader programme, namely, “how to handle people from different backgrounds” (intercultural sensitivity) and “handle a situation” (critical thinking). These two developments can be said to be embedded in a broader change in mindset. As described by Dweck, mindset is the view you adopt of yourself, which “profoundly affects the way you lead your life” (Dweck, 2006, p.7). Specifically, Dweck suggests that whether you believe in your continuing ability to learn (growth mindset) or whether you believe you have already achieved all your abilities (fixed mindset), affects the way you approach problems, relationships and failures. Individuals with a growth mindset are more open to adapt, change their opinions, and adopt other attitudes, precisely because they believe their intelligence can still be developed.

If we apply this train of thought into the Peace Leader interviews, we can see that graduates demonstrate this growth mindset as they show an openness to learning, thinking and to making an effort in their relationships with others. Furthermore, this relates to achieving a heightened self-confidence because, through believing in themselves, graduates become less anxious or concerned about other people’s judgement and therefore demonstrate a disposition to adopt growth in an empowered mindset (Dweck, 2006). It is in this confident belief in their thinking basis, that a growth mindset is open to failure and this is observable in the following quote of a Peace Leader graduate in Kerala, India:

*“After the peace course, I’d like to talk to everybody, meet everybody; sometimes, some people don’t respond but it’s not my problem, it’s their problem, it’s their freedom to talk to who they want, I don’t need to force them to talk about it.” (INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD)*

Here, the graduate relates an ability to handle the costs of possible challenges against the benefit of interacting and exchanging with a new person. In this sense, they demonstrate a disposition to think in terms of growth, to be open to challenges and failing and reflect on achieving an inner peace in being comfortable with themselves independent of how others react. This appears to be a theme across the interviews conducted in that graduates demonstrate having had this change of mindset, especially when it comes to the way they think and to the way they relate to diverse people. These are encompassed and further discussed in this chapter under the terms of a critical thinking mindset and an interreligious and intercultural mindset.

### 3.1 Critical Thinking Mindset

According to Peter Facione, Carol Gittens and Noreen Facione (2016), a critical thinking mindset is present in someone who possesses a “consistent internal motivation to engage in problems and to make decisions by using critical thinking” (Facione et al., 2016); in other words, more than possessing the necessary skillset for analysis when value is given to critical thinking, a person could be said to have adopted this skill in their mindset. This is also found in interviews with graduates. For example, one graduate in India says:





**“The results in my daily life issues are a great witness and proof of my critical thinking improvement. I better control the situation with the possible outcomes that come from my thinking and people around me – I have also started trusting this quality that has freshly come into me.”**

– ID\_PL\_G3\_Z

Here, they demonstrate not only that they perceive the value of applying critical thinking to their lives but that it also leads to concrete results and changes perceptible to people around them. In some sense, almost all graduates talked about the aspect of critical thinking, with all explaining that the course led to an increase in their abilities to perform that skill. Nevertheless, they offered definitions of the concept that took several forms, ranging from the ability to be creative to searching for facts. The next box expands upon the nuanced definitions of critical thinking provided by the graduates.

Cumulatively, the interviews show that graduates demonstrate the capacity for analysis and, from there, coming up with their own opinion; all graduates also refer to their learning experience in the course having helped them to develop their critical thinking (ID\_PL\_G3\_Z; AH\_PL\_G21\_F; KK\_PL\_G9\_J). Indeed, some techniques introduced by the Peace Leader programme are recounted as helping graduates to think critically. In Malawi, one interviewee said:

*“When you are stressed up or you are somewhere, they give some points like fourth breath practicing and I remember those kinds of things, you should sit somewhere; so I tried to practice them both as we were learning and they increased my critical thinking. How? Because when I am sitting down, thinking of an idea, I don’t think only positive thoughts, I also think negatively. [...] [Now], I am thinking it is going to be good to me as other people are going to benefit from me; all of them, I learnt from this course. [...] So, critical thinking changed the way through the course.” (MD\_PL\_G9\_P)*

Graduates evidence the way in which having critical thinking skills leads them to feeling more confident and qualified to help other people and assist them in making a decision as well as contributing to the achievement of inner peace (KK\_PL\_G6\_G). In this sense, through the adoption of a critical thinking mindset, graduates become more opinionated and active people in their communities because they believe in their capacity to deliver solid judgements and solutions to themselves and to those around them. For instance, one graduate in Malawi states:

*“I see things differently from the way other people who did not attend this course can see them. So, those who do not have this kind of knowledge are somehow different because I believe that I think differently because there are other things that I see in the community with my friends. I see that whenever we are looking on something [...], we find that we bring different kinds of ideas towards a situation and, in most cases, find that my ideas are dominating.” (MD\_PL\_G4\_P)*

Graduates can thus perceive that they have distinct thinking skills to analyse and solve situations, which gives them confidence to intervene in their community.



## Multiple Definitions of Critical Thinking:

During interviews, graduates engaged in personal definitions of critical thinking, which took on several forms, such as:

- The ability to be creative, think outside the box and have multiple solutions for a problem (KK\_PL\_G9\_J; AB\_PL\_G19\_F; KK\_PL\_G5\_G).
- A period of reflection before reaching a decision or an opinion (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M; KK\_PL\_G5\_G)
- The consideration of positive and negative effects of something for you and people around you. For instance, one graduate in Malawi defined it as “not just a special way of thinking, thinking positively and negatively to the benefits to yourself, in the community and the people you are living with.” (MD\_PL\_G9\_P)
- Seeking different opinions and perspectives in order to form their own (AH\_PL\_G21\_F, AH\_PL\_G22\_F, IQE\_PL\_G1\_A). In India, one graduate says: “It’s not good, in my opinion, if we blindly know the conflict or issue. Then we understand what is happening and we talk with them generously, [...], and critical thinking is very important. ” (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD)
- The necessity to engage in self-criticism. In India, one graduate related: “It is to criticize and question your own basic thinking and find its deeper points you think about. No one can criticize your work or your thinking as you can do it.” (ID\_PL\_G1\_Z)
- To be able to have a precise, long-term plan (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M).

Thus, graduates view critical thinking as a rational tool examining not only one’s environment, but also one’s own personal thoughts and relationship with others.

For example, another graduate in Malawi says that when they notice that a girl in her community can be involved in a toxic relationship, they believe it is better to “approach and start advising, how to react and take decisions” (MD\_PL\_G3\_P). Therefore, believing in their critical thinking skills turns graduates into more active members of their communities and more confident in expressing their opinion and intervening (KK\_PL\_G2\_J; IQD\_PL\_G3\_A; AB\_PL\_G8\_F; AB\_PL\_G19\_F); which is believed to be their role acting as Peace Leaders (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M).

In more concrete terms, critical thinking is mostly expressed by graduates as helping them to reach decisions and solve problems. For instance, a graduate from Kenya states:

*“... some problems or conflicts are actually more complicated and actually need critical thinking. When you don’t have a critical thinking capacity, it is difficult for you to even solve the problem because some people, like, say have a problem. They don’t want to even meet in order to solve them and, for that reason, you have to use your mind.” (KK\_PL\_G6\_G),*



a sentiment shared by many others (KK\_PL\_G9\_J; AB\_PL\_G19\_F; ID\_PL\_G4\_Z, MD\_PL\_G9\_P).

Critical thinking plays a role in how to effectively tackle a problem for graduates. That is, relating to the definition of critical thinking as creativity, some graduates recount that the skill helps them in achieving solutions tailored to particular circumstances and actors so that they are successful in their context. In Malawi, one graduate shared an example from their professional life as a teacher. They explained that after analysing the issue of parents' absenteeism to a school meeting, they decided to create a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication with busy parents (MD\_PL\_G9\_P). This graduate concludes that:

*"It is really hard to think of something that will help people who are older than you. In fact, I am talking about when [...] you are leading parents and children. So, to think something which will convince the parents easily is not that way. So, I really decided the course really helped me and they can decide something. When in a parent meeting, I can bring out ideas and decide on that which can even help them, and they can agree with it." (MD\_PL\_G9\_P)*

In this example, the graduate therefore demonstrates that they are able to be creative in achieving a solution in their circumstances and therefore getting successful results and improve their communication skills due to their critical thinking.

Similar to this graduate's growth in communication skill, graduates mention how they have become listeners and open-



Figure 7: Peace Leader students in Dzaleka Refugee camp, Malawi, during an onsite meeting



mindful in order to consider other's points (AB\_PL\_G5\_F; IQE\_PL\_G1\_A; KK\_PL\_G2\_J). They are also more sensitive to how others would like to be addressed and how to best approach them. For example, in Afghanistan, a graduate who has become a teacher says that:

*"When I go to some classes and most of the students do not know me, I first have some fun with them and I share a joke with them so that they feel relaxed with me and get to know me and relax. Actually, [...] an example of critical thinking is from some classes I attended. I asked them: Do you know me? What do you think I am? What is my purpose in coming to your classes? Therefore, all the students were thinking critically, what should we say? or what can we do? or who is she actually? [...] and why did she come into our classes?" (AB\_PL\_G8\_F)*

### 3.2 Intercultural and Interreligious Mindset

The concept of an intercultural and interreligious mindset has multiple definitions in the relevant literature but, overall, it relates to the extent to which individuals are able and willing to understand, be sensitive about and constructively interact with people from cultures or religions different to theirs. For scholars such as Bennett (1986), this mindset can be measured in terms of somebody's attitude towards difference. That is, if there is acceptance that religions and cultures "differ fundamentally in the way they create and maintain world views" (Bennett, 1986, p. 181), then effective relationships across cultures and religions are more likely to be built. In the same vein, the concept has been previously linked to an ability to adapt personal identities to multiple cultural and religious settings (Byram, 1997), and has also been defined in terms of a specific set of knowledge and skills that develops into achieving

attitudes, such as adaptability and empathy towards other cultures and religions (Deardorff et al., 2012). In essence, it encompasses a positive and comprehensive mindset towards people with other cultures or religions.

Similarly, graduates have defined an intercultural and interreligious mindset as "being good, understand all are doing together, [...] accepting others with their differences" (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M), or "the ability to influence and engage followers from different groups" (AB\_PL\_G5\_F). When asked about an interreligious and intercultural mindset, graduates highlighted that they have learned to live with others, understand and not judge beliefs different to theirs, not be too defensive about adverse opinions to theirs, amongst other sentiments that demonstrate an acceptance and engagement with differences in terms of cultures or religions (MD\_PL\_G9\_P; AH\_PL\_G22\_F; AH\_PL\_G18\_F; KK\_PL\_G9\_J; INS\_PL\_G3\_MHD; IQD\_PL\_G1\_N).

Except for two graduates (ID\_PL\_G3\_Z; ID\_PL\_G1\_Z), who stated that the Peace Leader programme had no influence in enhancing their intercultural and interreligious mindset, all other interviewees claimed the course led to a positive change. Graduates mentioned that they have become able to live more constructively with others and to handle intercultural or interreligious problems more effectively (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A; INS\_PL\_G3\_MHD; KK\_PL\_G5\_G; MD\_PL\_G3\_P).

In fact, one of the most interesting examples of such transformation is well exemplified by a graduate from Iraq. He





states that the way the course really impacted his intercultural and interreligious mindset was through the interaction he had with his onsite facilitator who had a different religious identity, being of Islamic faith. He explained that he previously had difficulties engaging with Muslim people given the genocide, referring to the persecution of the Yezidi community in the region. However, he noticed in class that the facilitator was “a great person” and made him realise that:



“This course helps all of us to feel open minded and to talk about things like this [...]. Some people ask us this or some such questions so what is it like having, you know, different people [...] from different religions and cultures [...] and, obviously, the course helped a lot.”

– IQE\_PL\_G1\_M

In this sentiment, the JWL centre plays a central role in cultivating an intercultural and interreligious environment which inspires and pushes students to become interculturally sensitive and comprehensive. This graduate even stresses that, after the course, he has been able to have “universal friends” and communicate and socialise with very diverse people and to expand his intercultural and interreligious mindset.

Many other graduates reflected on the impact of learning in JWL’s global student community in their intercultural and interreligious mindset, often noting that

the course was structured so they had contact with diversity which helped the development of that perspective. This is related in one of two ways: graduates have either come more into contact with different cultures and religions in their onsite centres or through the online classroom.

While both aspects are often mentioned across all countries, it was more common for graduates in Kenya, Malawi and Iraq to mention the onsite classroom as a source of engagement with multiculturalism. Echoing the sentiment shared by the interviewee mentioned above, one graduate in Malawi mentions:

*“When I was in DRC, in my home country, I was not friends with people who are not Congolese but when I came to Malawi, especially when I was learning here, I came into contact with different people and different cultures, [...]. I understood through discussions on the course that some are from Malawi, some Rwanda, Burundi, DRC and Kenya; therefore, I came to understand why I can say that JWL is making sure people from different cultures unite. Okay, in terms of religion, [...] I am from the New Apostolic Church and I was learning with Muslims, Catholics and Protestants so Peace Leader made us friends; even when we were doing like these other interviews I came into contact with someone from another religion so, it’s really supporting.” (MD\_PL\_G3\_P)*

The JWL learning centre is therefore highlighted by graduates as a place for encountering differences and where individuals of different religious and cultural backgrounds are put together and can interact. This often leads to the formation of interpersonal bonds across cultures and religions and therefore the enhancement of a graduate’s understanding of differences as well as the disposition to build a cohesive relationship with people (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M;



MD\_PL\_G4\_P; KK\_PL\_G2\_J; AB\_PL\_G8\_F; IQE\_PL\_G1\_A).

Though there was one graduate who mentioned that a colleague felt very uncomfortable with such onsite meetings (AH\_PL\_G22\_F), most graduates reported that they enjoyed being in a space of multiculturalism and exchange, to the extent that some who now have contact with other students, claim to be working to inculcate in their pupils with this kind of sensitivity and openness (KK\_PL\_G9\_J; AB\_PL\_G8\_F). In this perspective, another student even suggested that in countries with multiple centres, students should meet once, share and discuss (IQD\_PL\_G1\_N).

On the other hand, in the centres located in Afghanistan and India, the online classroom appears more impactful for developing an intercultural and interreligious mindset. Rather than the onsite classroom in this iteration, being online with other students learning simultaneously in other centres was given relevance for putting graduates into contact with different opinions and perspectives. In Afghanistan, for instance, one graduate says that in the platform, they:

*"...could really feel how cultures are different and how we were exchanging ideas according to our culture but all those differences never caused us to fight or be aggressive. Everyone had very different ideas but we studied those ideas. Even when we had not agreed with an idea, I respected their idea and that is one very good thing I learned during this course." (AH\_PL\_G21\_F)*

In addition to learning how to engage with and respect diversity, this graduate in Afghanistan continues on to say that they:

*"...had found many friends with different religions and from different cultures; we were from very different countries and only two of us were from Afghanistan. Others were from different countries or from African countries or from Iraq and these other countries, so we sometimes had questions we were writing about when we had to share our own experiences." (AH\_PL\_G21\_F),*

demonstrating thus that even the online space presented itself as an opportunity to build interpersonal relationships across cultures and religions (INS\_PL\_G2\_MHD, IQK\_PL\_G3\_M, IQD\_PL\_G2\_A).

Furthermore, the online platform is also referred to as a space in which students become more aware and understanding of the world and international events around them, as well as how people in those locations react to it. For instance, one student in India says:

*"Seeing the empowering of our classmates, global classmates from different countries, who are suffering with a lot of issues, which they mention in our group discussions. We are realising what has happened in our world; we are studying this course and we know what is happening in our world, [...] we know what happened and what they are suffering for and it feels very painful. One of our friends wrote 'I want to read the materials but I couldn't have the time for writing and doing the assignments,' but he's in a bad situation, he's in a war, so... we feel that and we know each other and we have a connection with worldwide students and in Sri Lanka, or... other countries, and what their cultures are, and some of them say that the classrooms are divided, and giving a carton like that and I thought that, so... we know the cultural differences in other countries and conflicts, and how they happened, so we have a global vision, global perspective getting into courses." (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD)*

In this sense, other graduates also mentioned how they became more aware of world matters because of the online platform, learning even to put their realities and struggles into perspective (INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD) and exercising





Figure 8: View of the Peace Leader programme in JWL's Learning Management System

empathy towards others after hearing about the perspectives of people in the context itself (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M).

Therefore, both through their online and onsite interactions, graduates are able to further their intercultural and interreligious understanding because of the increase in communication with diverse persons and exercising openness to listening, considering and empathising with their perspectives. This disposition reflects a choice to make an effort towards integrating different thoughts from other cultural and religious backgrounds into their own lives, which communicates with further development of cultivating intercultural and interreligious sensitivity (Bennett, 1986).

### 3.2.1 Respectfulness

Firstly, it is interesting to note that the sentiment of being respectful towards people from other cultures and religions was expressed by graduates as a baseline reflection of their intercultural and interreligious sensitivity. It appears as a way to live together in a diverse society and an essential feeling towards the goal of achieving a conducive environment to cohabit multiculturally (ID\_PL\_G4\_Z). For instance, one interviewee said:

*"We are encouraged to cooperate with both people and the society, regardless of their differences or our differences. [...] That will help us to build a strong foundation whereby even if we are living in a house containing Christians and Muslims, we won't be having a lot of conflicts concerning those religions but, instead, we are supposed to respect each other's religions."* (KK\_PL\_G2\_J)



In this sense, respectfulness is often translated by graduates as being tolerant and allowing others to practice their culture or religion even if they differ from the graduate's own habits (MD\_PL\_G4\_P; IQK\_PL\_G2\_M; AH\_PL\_G18\_F).

Furthermore, graduates even related this sentiment to having confidence. For instance:



**“Now I have self-confidence in how to respect other communities, [...] like many things and how to respect the beliefs of others on how to connect two communities. Before taking this course, I didn't know anything.”**

– IQK\_PL\_G2\_F

Therefore, feeling confident in themselves, graduates adopt a mindset of understanding towards these differences, embracing them and accepting the coexistence of different beliefs and habits.

### 3.2.2 Acceptance

More than respect, graduates also expressed sensitivity in terms of acceptance. That is, beyond tolerating others, graduates were also open to hearing about and adopting other ideas and identities. This approach is promoted by a mindset that not only respects differences but engages with it and accepts that it is a legitimate way of life. For example, in Afghanistan, a graduate states:

*“I didn't notice it directly, but after the course I got to realise that I was more open minded, you know [...] I could see other people and I could talk to other people [...]. I believe that the course helped me to develop my mutual understanding with others, [...] my multicultural acceptance [...]. Yes, I believe that the course helped me to mingle with other people very well without considering your religion or your culture.” (AH\_PL\_G21\_F)*

In this sense, acceptance comes into play through the expression of being open minded towards different habits and opinions (KK\_PL\_G6\_G, KK\_PL\_G5\_G, AB\_PL\_G19\_F, IQE\_PL\_G1\_A).

This overarching sentiment of being open minded, thinking critically and accepting difference can also impact the disposition graduates demonstrate towards change and bending cultural habits, even in their own context. In Iraq, for example, one graduate stated that he started to teach women and girls how to drive cars, even if it is not widely accepted by all members of his community. He states:

*“Some people deny that women or girls can drive cars but I showed it to them and some of my friends, like girls, started to learn how to drive a car and they asked their parents. [...] They told me that they wanted to learn how to drive cars but were afraid of the community [...] and were too shy to tell their parents. I told them just to feel free and ask for what they want. If they are denied, maybe it would be difficult but one day they will let you drive a car. It's not something bad [...] and I showed many of them and they asked their parents; finally, their parents accepted and now they drive cars.” (IQK\_PL\_G2\_N)*

Adopting an open-minded mindset towards difference also makes graduates more open to change in their own cultural or religious habits in addition to accepting customs different to theirs. Ultimately, this disposition is also linked to the performance of their role as peace leaders because part of their task is allowing



people to be free enough to believe what they believe and be accepted into the community regardless (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A).

### 3.2.3 Equality

Another sentiment expressed towards other cultures and religions by graduates was one of equality. In this respect, it differs significantly from tolerating difference or accepting it; this sentiment represents a mindset where graduates explain that despite being from different cultures or religions, they are ultimately equal to other human beings. By adopting this mindset, graduates do not overlook cultural or religious differences but rather understand that even when that difference exists, it does not impact and, in essence, they are equal in their humanity (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A). This is illustrated by a graduate in Iraq, who has now become a teacher. They state that in their first

lecture, two students were fighting because of their religious cultures and so they state:

*"I wanted to give them [...] the same advice and tips I learned on the Peace Leader course, so I told them the same, such as, the beliefs you have is called ideology and that's just in your mind. It's for you to practice for yourself but, being loved, helping, taking care of others, is something for all humans, so you are all the same and equal, whether girl, boy or different religion from me as a Christian; do whatever you are, you are the same when I look at you all, with the same standard" (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M).*

This captures graduates' sentiment of equality which ultimately means that all are to be treated with the same sense of empathy, even if they are different culturally or religiously. On a further iteration, the notion can also play out in viewing some equality between different cultures and religions.



Figure 9: Sharing among students during an onsite meeting in Iraq





For example, a former student in Kenya, who is now a teacher, says that they try to teach their students that one must:

*"...embrace different cultures for example, like we have a cultural day okay? We have a cultural day whereby we give the opportunity to students to practice all their cultures and we are able to embrace all of them. That is how we solve the problem, which means students are able to appreciate all cultures. No culture is higher than others and no one is estimated more than the other." (KK\_PL\_G9\_J)*

### 3.2.4 Adaptability

All three sentiments of respectfulness, acceptance and equality lead to different attitudes demonstrated by graduates. The first relevant attitude to bring out is one of adaptability, which stems from feelings of tolerance and acceptance of difference, an attitude of adapting to different cultural or religious practices. For instance, the same graduate in Kenya cited above, after expressing the notion that, ultimately, all cultures are equal and legitimate before stating that in the school where they teach,

*"...like a Christian, you give them time when it's their time for prayer we give them the opportunity. This is the same for our brothers from Islam; we also appreciate and give them the opportunity to exercise their religion and they then know that all religions and cultures are important and need to be respected." (KK\_PL\_G9\_J)*

They allow for different practices to coexist in one school, trying to adapt the routine to these diverse practices.

Graduates thus present this attitude of flexibility in trying to accommodate different cultures and religions, through the awareness, understanding and acceptance of that difference. This graduate ultimately states that they became better able to handle students

from different cultures and religions because they were willing to adapt their own behaviour and communication style to their needs (KK\_PL\_G9\_J).

Similarly, this attitude is also expressed by graduates as a way of believing in their capacity to understand and, therefore, adapt to a new cultural context (KK\_PL\_G5\_G; MD\_PL\_G9\_P). In India, for example, this is expressed by one graduate's occupation which they describe as:

*"Now I am not working with my own society. I'm coming in another society that is a fishing-dependent community, entirely different from my culture and my caste and everything; but I think they are the needed people, they are the marginalised people." (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD)*

In this sense, the graduate expresses that they believe in their capacity to understand and work with cultural circumstances that differ from their own.

In essence, therefore, graduates express a disposition to adapt to different cultural habits in order to promote a cohesive and constructive relationship amongst different people. An attitude, furthermore, that is only possible because of a feeling of acceptance and recognition of religious and cultural differences.

### 3.2.5 Fairness

Another attitude adopted by graduates towards other cultures and religions is one of justice. That is, they tend to demonstrate a wish to treat people fairly, taking into account their cultural or religious differences. Related to the sentiment of equality, graduates also understand that because people are equal in their humanity, they should all be treated with justice and, in this sense, their



religious or cultural differences should not influence the way they are treated. In Iraq, for instance, a graduate stated:

*"We were recruiting people for some job vacancies. There were people from nationalities from here and others, such as refugees or maybe from other countries that came and applied for the job. If I were making differences between them, it could go wrong because that's not how it should be. It should be based on the skills on the abilities and capabilities of that person and what they have to offer, not about their religion or anything; that's always what I care about the person. I've also always shared that with my company and that it should be that way and always work; therefore, we were successful in choosing people." (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A)*

Judgement, therefore, must not regard culture and religion with a negative connotation and that sentiment is also extended towards recognising that other groups treated graduates in a fair way. In Iraq, for example, one former student says that many people believed that:

*"Muslims [were] the reason for what happened in 2014. After that, I told them 'No, they are not, maybe some of them but not all of them. You should accept that some of them [...] support others they help and they give us the shelters, they give us food. We had nothing, they give us everything.' Their ideas changed about Muslims." (IQK\_PL\_G2\_N)*

In this sense, graduates also extensively share an attitude of treating others with fairness and justice.

### 3.2.6 Inclusivity

Lastly, and perhaps the most extensive attitude demonstrated by graduates is one of inclusivity. Therefore, more than adapting because of cultural or religious differences or treating all people with justice, this last attitude involves bringing people together in a single community. Most often expressed by graduates living

in a multicultural environment, such as refugee camps, the attitude of inclusivity is also most vividly displayed by this graduate living in Kakuma Refugee Camp stating:

*"But due to their skills and knowledge I got from the course, I'm able to bring all people together. I'm able to understand that all people are the same and all people need to live as one because, for instance, my students are from different cultures, they are from different ethnicity, they are from different religions. What I do is that I'm able to bring them together, I'm able to educate them, I'm able to tell them that they should live in coexistence rather than create division. They should not consider who is from the tribe, who is from this? No, they are always students and they deserve to be one and they have to live in one premises. I think this is how I manage too. With knowledge and skill, I managed to bring all students with different diversity to be one family." (KK\_PL\_G9\_J)*

This attitude of inclusivity here means bringing together people from different cultures and religious beliefs to live as one, even if they do not share all customs. With this attitude, graduates usually make inclusion of cultural and religious others easier, such as one former student who worked as a translator in an event formulated for women from different ethnic groups so that they could all understand each other (AB\_PL\_G5\_F). This inclusive attitude therefore is about embracing difference and fighting for harmony across cultures and religions (AB\_PL\_G19\_F; KK\_PL\_G5\_G, KK\_PL\_G9\_J).

In many ways, this attitude is the culmination of the mindset promoted by the course that allows graduates to perform their role as peace leaders in their communities. As expressed by a graduate in Kenya:



“Peace Leader is a way of understanding each other. It is a way of understanding each other and coming together as one family in one place.”

– KK\_PL\_G5\_G

Another graduate talks about the course in these terms:

*“The whole thing I studied is actually that you can let the people come together and live as one nation or one society.” (KK\_PL\_G6\_G)*

Therefore, graduates see their roles as peace leaders in the function of ensuring that people in their community, as diverse as they may seem, are able to coexist in harmony and come together.

In this sense, the development of an intercultural and interreligious mindset impacts the ways graduates approach people different to them; it further gives them an empowered mindset where they believe they are acting towards others in the best, most considerate way they could. Therefore, along with believing in their capacity to think critically, these developments help the achievement of inner peace in being a way that graduates become more comfortable with the ways they interact with issues and others.



Figure 10: Peace Leader students with their onsite facilitator, Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya





## 4 Inner peace

Throughout the interviews, this theme of personal transformation is stark, in that graduates highlight the ways in which they have experienced a lifelong learning which ultimately led them to achieving “inner peace” (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M; IQK\_PL\_G1\_M; ID\_PL\_G3\_Z). Inner peace is collectively described as an understanding of peace that goes beyond the absence of war and, therefore, is not only extrinsic, determined by the context that surrounds them. Rather, this concept is first intrinsic and then extends itself to external circumstances (KK\_PL\_G5\_G). Inner peace represents an understanding and acceptance of who graduates discovered themselves to be and it is a necessary step in coming to terms with traumatic external episodes some graduates have dealt with (IQK\_PL\_G1\_M). In addition, having accomplished that, graduates then relate being able to have more constructive interactions with others, which was termed ‘outer peace’ by one graduate in Iraq. They further expand that this means

*“... being good, understanding all we are doing together [...], accepting others with their differences. All this can be called peace, the real peace, not the one that we said only if there's no fight, then there is peace.” (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M)*

Furthermore, achieving inner peace has an impact in many other aspects of graduates’ lives, such as having “self-esteem and [...] self-determination towards my goals in life” (KK\_PL\_G2\_J), thinking “differently about the cultures” (INS\_PL\_G3\_MHD), or even becoming less

*“Worried about the everything I was before, [...] I was always worried about the job, the house, you know, the needs as a refugee. Here, everything is difficult so that concern was impacting when I*

*was returning home. Like, I didn't have time for my kids to be honest; that changed.” (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A)*

As shown in the box below, this process of personal transformation that leads to graduates’ achievement of inner peace is multifaceted and impacts their lives in diverse ways. However, in its essence, the experience shared in the interviews reveals a process of coming to terms with themselves, through expanding their self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-control and confidence that, in turn, shapes the ways in which graduates relate to others and to the specific characteristics of their environment. In fact, in many instances, the process of personal transformation is mentioned by graduates as a catalyst for them to reassess personal problems and conflicts they previously had in their lives.

Another common relational consequence of achieving inner peace is through self-awareness, here connected to how graduates understand holistic change, which is seen as a process that first addresses the self, then people close to the self before extending to the whole of society (AH\_PL\_G22\_F; INS\_PL\_G3\_MHD; IQD\_PL\_G1\_N; KK\_PL\_G2\_J). This is expressed by the following graduate in Iraq:

*“I'm at peace with myself and, currently, I'm trying to achieve peace in my community around me, not the whole community, just my neighbours and my family. We had some conflicts and I'm trying to fix them by working on them [...]; what I want in the future is to try to implement things that I learned in my community as a whole.” (IQD\_PL\_G1\_N)*

Self-awareness here is also a way for graduates to understand how change is to be promoted in a careful and gentle manner, in that they perceive the necessity



of starting small and progressively implementing more change as a way of being able to promote a holistic transformation in their surroundings.

This process of transformation is also in parallel with the development of a mindset encompassing critical thoughts and intercultural sensitivity that also enable graduates to find inner peace. As graduates build self-confidence in their thinking process, it allows an empowered mindset that eventually contributes to reaching inner peace. In other words, on top of the need to build self-awareness and

self-confidence, belief in their way of thinking and relating to others is also a necessary step towards inner peace for it reassures graduates of how they deal with situations. As we understand inner peace as an intrinsic achievement that then extends itself to the external world, this empowered mindset is open to growth and is a symbol of a healthy and confident relationship between who graduates are and how they think, which results in gaining inner peace.



Figure 11: Peace Leader students and facilitators during an onsite meeting in Iraq



## 5 Servant Leadership

This report has tried to capture how, through their journey in the Peace Leader programme, graduates' personal transformation and development of a critical mindset inclusive of differences led them towards finding inner peace. Analysis of graduates' interviews showed that students intervene in their environments in multiple ways but are always interacting with the idea of a peace leader, as shared in the last chapter, including people by understanding and bringing different people into one harmonious interactive environment. This willingness to act as a peace leader within one's environment is possible through development of servant leadership, comprising three main characteristics: being humble, being able to solve conflict and being a role model. Through these characteristics and skills, graduates intervene in their communities, as explored in further detail in the following sections. Altogether, this final development leads to a second outcome of the course, which is nurturing peaceful communities.

### 5.1 A Servant Leader striving for Peace

In the interviews, graduates talk of feeling capable and empowered to become active members of their community, developing a sense of community and responsibility over it, striving to empower others and being recognised as leaders by the people who surround them. In fact, their description of leadership follows the idea of Servant Leadership, expanding upon the notion of leadership as an interactive and collective process rather than a personal skill to be imposed on others. According to the literature, servant leadership is a style

of leadership that aims to serve first (Greenleaf, 2002, 2014). In that perspective, leadership would aim to assist others first and foremost, to support their growth and fight against forms of oppression in society. The ultimate and principal marker of a servant leader is precisely such motivation and drive towards others' wellbeing (Rega and Honen-Delmar, 2022) or, as expressed by graduates themselves:

*"A leader is someone who knows the way, shows the way and goes the way, which means he or she should know how to go that way, as well as not only telling people to go that way but standing alone there; so, the Leader should be with people not separate from people."*  
(AH\_PL\_G22\_F)

A sense to help others is therefore cultivated by graduates, who relate learning how to "go out [in] the community" (MD\_PL\_G9\_P), communicate in a team and identify its problems (ID\_PL\_G4\_Z, AH\_PL\_G18\_F), having empathy (AB\_PL\_G5\_F) and "understanding the needs of others, before my own" (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A), amongst other characteristics that enable them to act as servant leaders (ID\_PL\_G3\_Z; ID\_PL\_G1\_Z).

Interestingly, the enactment of servant leadership is perceived in multiple spheres depending on the graduate. Mostly, former students define their leading roles: (1) at home: such as a graduate in Iraq who states that while he doesn't act in his community, he learned from the course what being a good father at home should look like and that he now leads and influences his children in a healthy way (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A); (2) at work: with some graduates highlighting how the course helped them navigate their professional



environment and treat people more effectively in that sense (AB\_PL\_G5\_F); or (3) in their broader community, which is perhaps the most expansive sphere that graduates relate to leadership. In this context, it is worth mentioning that many graduates continued on to become teachers, which is how they define their interaction with their community, through children and in their profession as teachers (MD\_PL\_G9\_P; AB\_PL\_G8\_F).

Other graduates, articulate that they act as servant leaders in their communities by attempting to help and seek the benefit of those they live with, regardless of their personal relationships or lack of familiarity (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A; KK\_PL\_G6\_G; MD\_PL\_G3\_P; AB\_PL\_G8\_F). In Kenya, for instance, a student claims:

*"I really interact with the community a lot. Whenever I have free time, I can visit them; we discuss and have meals together [...]. This course has supported me because as a person or as a peace leader, you need to observe community and realise that this community wants you to do something to them in the future."* (KK\_PL\_G5\_G)

Hence, graduates demonstrate the initiative to interact with the people around them in an attempt to be helpful and support in ways they can, demonstrating a sense of community.

Indeed, this community commitment is shared among all graduates as they give importance to being part of a group and living with others. This commitment, according the graduates, ultimately entails striving to understand and caring for those around you and taking shared responsibility for major issues present in their surroundings (AB\_PL\_G19\_F, MD\_PL\_G9\_P, IQK\_PL\_G2\_M, AB\_PL\_G5\_F). This leads graduates to

*"think for everyone, feel for everyone and do for everyone because I have started treating everyone as I want to be treated"* (ID\_PL\_G3\_Z),

a key mentality to push the community forward and allow it to grow (ID\_PL\_G4\_Z, AH\_PL\_G21\_F). Moreover, there is an understanding that important values and responsibilities are shared amongst people in the community (AH\_PL\_G22\_F, AB\_PL\_G8\_F), like a neighbourhood (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A), which means that graduates feel that they belong to a group (MD\_PL\_G3\_P). The cultivation of that understanding, furthermore, appears as the key for a good servant leadership (KK\_PL\_G2\_J).

Integrity and being principled, furthermore, is also recurrently brought up by graduates as a necessary trait for leaders (IQD\_PL\_G1\_N; KK\_PL\_G9\_J, MD\_PL\_G9\_P, MD\_PL\_G4\_P). In this sense, kindness, fairness and non-discrimination are recurrent values mentioned (AH\_PL\_G22\_F, AB\_PL\_G8\_F).

*"When you start solving problems without discrimination, it is not concentrating on ethnicity or gender or whatever nationality, which means everyone can recognize that you know you have real leadership."* (KK\_PL\_G6\_G)

This demonstrates the direction in which a graduate's actions are geared towards and emphasises their sense of community and willingness to include diverse people (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M). In this respect, it is interesting to note that the importance of integrity also translates into motivation to exercise a role as a peace leader. As formulated by one graduate in Iraq, seeing people who were supposedly community leaders around him not acting and only enjoying their privileges, meant that he was much more inclined to intervene on behalf of his community. As he said:





*"I saw all the leaders, who were just maybe having a luxury life, while the others, all these innocent survivors, were just deprived of all the new rights. And I said no, this is something which needs to be stopped here; just go for it, it encouraged me [...]. During the course I said now it's done, that's it, just do something for them [...] I said, if I don't do it, then who will do it [...]."* (IQK\_PL\_G1\_M)

The above quote also evidences a further nuance with which graduates refer to their roles as servant leaders, in the way that they express feeling a sense of responsibility towards their communities which justifies the exercise of this ambition (KK\_PL\_G5\_G, AB\_PL\_G8\_F, INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD, AB\_PL\_G8\_F, AB\_PL\_G19\_F). As explained by another graduate in Iraq, responsibility and proactivity towards problems going on around them is a key characteristic of the role of peace leader:

*"Even if there is conflict, even if it does not belong to me and I was not part of it; in my role as a peace leader after I graduated on this course, I must go and try and do my best to find a solution for this conflict. I will not say it's not my business, or it's not... no, every conflict matters to me because it's my job as a peace leader. I must sacrifice, I have to sacrifice to find solutions."* (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M)

In this respect, graduates are personally involved in the community because they believe in that duty; therefore, they will act as well as passing on leadership skills and their communal and integral values to their follow community members (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A, ID\_PL\_G4\_Z). In Iraq, graduates are also recognised as legitimate leaders by the community who reportedly actively seek their advice (MD\_PL\_G9\_P, ID\_PL\_G3\_Z). As expressed by this graduate in Kenya:



**"Especially the community I live in, they know me very well. You know, especially in solving problems after I'm doing this course. [...] They even used to call me peace leader. You know, they know me very well."**

– KK\_PL\_G6\_G

For other graduates, this sense of community is reflected in their advocacy seeking greater good for their community. For instance, one graduate and activist in Iraq reported their sense of community after tensions between the army and a militia group resulted in conflict and bombings close to where they lived. They organised and participated in demonstrations against the conflict, gathering people from their community, recording their demonstrations and posting them on social media. Eventually, such events pushed the Government to invite them to attend talks and reach some sort of agreements (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M).

This willingness to help and serve others and build peace around them is further evidenced by their many declarations that highlight the dedication towards their communities, in assisting with their problems and passing on values or building bridges (KK\_PL\_G5\_G; MD\_PL\_G4\_P; IQD\_PL\_G3\_A; IQK\_PL\_G2\_N; INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD, AH\_PL\_G22\_F; AB\_PL\_G19\_F).

Ultimately, they all tend to highlight a leadership that is embedded in values such as integrity and humility and that is





Figure 12: Students during an onsite meeting in Iraq

constantly aimed at the best interests for the whole community (AB\_PL\_G19\_F).

There are certain specific traits that enable a graduate being a servant leader; amongst many mentioned by interviewees, the most prominent included being a humble leader, a role model and a problem-solver, all of which are further detailed below.

## 5.2 Humble Leader: listening and acting first

Throughout the interviews, many graduates define their leadership style as being a humble leader or by simply listening and acting for others first. Related to the principle of humility, many graduates express never claiming to be leaders but leading others by their

examples and by their actions. For example, one graduate in Iraq said:

*"I should not call myself a leader, people around need to accept if I can be a leader or not once they see my actions, once they see my behaviour towards them. So, for me, although I took this course and although I know about leadership and I learnt many things about how to be a leader, a good leader, let's say a good servant leader, I won't call myself a leader but I can apply what leaders do." (IQE\_PL\_G1\_A)*

In this respect, graduates also report being a humble leader in reflection of the idea of leadership as an interactive process, in which the role is not claimed but organically produced by circumstances. In this mindset, graduates report that they simply do, act, interfere, without claiming they have a right to or trying to garner attention towards it (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M). In effect, when asked how people will



recognise them as a leader, a common phrase used by graduates reflecting this characteristic is “because of the things that I do” (MD\_PL\_G4\_P). Thus, graduates lead by example and cultivate the skill of a humble, initiative, leader that shares a “willingness without expectations” (MD\_PL\_G4\_P).

This humility is also displayed in the graduates’ behaviour, who actively listen to their followers or community members. Indeed, one of the most recurrent skills mentioned by graduates when referring to how they exercised their roles as a peace leaders was active listening. The skill of listening, in this respect, ultimately comprehends two senses: (1) as a necessary step into being attuned with their communities, or (2) as a way that graduates help others. Under the first understanding of this skill, active listening is referred to by graduates as the necessary step leaders should take to stay in touch with the people around them, giving insight into how they might think and potential ways in which they can help their communities (AB\_PL\_G20\_F; AB\_PL\_G5\_F; AB\_PL\_G20\_F). For example, a graduate in Afghanistan related:



“One of the most interesting things I learned from the course was holistic listening. Sometimes people might be impolite and the course taught us to not listen to the words but [...] to the feelings beyond the words [...]. I don't want to see the noise, [...] I just want to see the needs that are not met.”

– AH\_PL\_G21\_F

On the other hand, active listening is also put forward by graduates as a way of helping others. Thus, simply listening to somebody who needs an ear, is in itself a form of assistance and servant leadership. In this respect, a graduate in Iraq explains:

*“Being there for them is also a kind of leadership; you will not tell them that I am a leader and I lead you. It will just be simple as they think I am there to listen to them; some people, you know, don't need anything, they don't need money, they don't need shelters but they need someone to listen to them as this would comfort them [...], a good listener, being patient, leaving myself aside and thinking of others first.”* (IQE\_PL\_G1\_A)

Another graduate in India expressed the idea this way:

*“I practise generative listening for them and what they are saying. I'm calm and cool and sit with them and I understand my body structure, how to listen to them and maintain eye contact, [...] which is new from the course and it's helping to create a heart-to-heart. So that is the first thing in a peace leader's goals.”* (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD)

Therefore, listening can also be related to leadership as a way to help and connect with people (AB\_PL\_G8\_F, INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD).

In both senses, listening appears to be an important skill associated with the role of a leader, in that it allows graduates to truly evaluate and connect with the people surrounding them. This contributes to forming a humble leadership style as graduates are therefore able to help either simply by demonstrating support towards others with listening, through the effective understanding of situations that attentive listening allows and through their actions seeking the benefits of others first.



### 5.3 Problem-solver

As part of their leadership, another very relevant skill graduates related having and exercising in their contexts is problem-solving. Problem-solving is often identified as one of the most relevant roles of a peace leader, who therefore can solve challenges and, through that, help people around them (AB\_PL\_G20\_F; AB\_PL\_G5\_F). Graduates recognise themselves as being amongst the few people in their communities who can easily solve problems from those around them and avoid the escalation of conflict (AB\_PL\_G20\_F).

This skill is often associated with being compassionate and aiming to converse calmly as a means to achieve a solution, as explained by a graduate in Afghanistan. They have started to

*“encourage others to lower their voices when there is a conflict because they can resolve a conflict without raising their voices; [...] you just encourage everyone to lower their voice and you can resolve the conflicts with lower voices.”* (AH\_PL\_G21\_F)

Another characteristic of problem-solvers, according to graduates, is to be impartial and empathetic with all and instigating productive communication geared towards a peaceful outcome and putting justice into practice. Here again, being a good listener and paying attention to both sides of a conflict is of very high importance (MD\_PL\_G4\_P), as explained by a graduate in Afghanistan.

*“One thing is being a good listener and to look at something from different perspectives and to*

*not think they are 100% right and the other group is wrong.”* (AH\_PL\_G21\_F)

Graduates explain that the Peace Leader course, which offers learning about concepts such as the State or war and how conflicts can take shape, ultimately contributed to building their conflict resolution skills (AB\_PL\_G19\_F, IQK\_PL\_G2\_N). One recurring concept that helped graduates to understand and solve conflict is “the conflict tree”<sup>4</sup> (INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD, IQK\_PL\_G1\_M). Breaking down a situation in this way is a thought process that led students to “analyse the whole process and how to come out of it, the path we need to take and how it can affect [us]” (INS\_PL\_G1\_MHD).

Learning to break down conflicts into stages and identify a causal chain that has led to the escalation of a problem, therefore, is one of the main ways students reflect gaining problem-solving skills and an analysis approach they often employ to resolve an issue. In Iraq, for example, one graduate said:

*“For every problem, for every conflict that happens, if you go back to the conflict theory lesson, it always says there is something before the conflict that you have to solve; that is, some causes, some reasons, some roots of the conflict. OK, if you ignore that and just focus on the conflict, you may not solve it easily but if you know the source of the conflict, the rules, the real reasons, it could be solved so much easier.”* (IQD\_PL\_G3\_A)

This approach also meant that students tend to be more instigated to dig deep into an issue before reaching a conclusion,

<sup>4</sup> This concept is introduced under the topic conflict analysis where students are encouraged to break down such situations into the ‘who’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ of the conflict, which is where the analogy of a tree is employed to guide students to separate the causes of the conflict (the root), its core issue (the trunk of a tree) and its effects (the branches and leaves of a tree).





Figure 13: Onsite meeting with Peace Leader students in Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi

which means that their resolution skills are grounded on analytical skills aimed at observing and breaking down facts, rather than depending on emotions and instinct (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M).

Graduates also reflect on another concept of the course, which is that of “the drama triangle”<sup>5</sup>. Graduates mention the drama triangle as a key analytical tool they learnt during the course, claiming that they actively try not to think of themselves as victims when facing issues (IQK\_PL\_G2\_M), communicating with parties in terms of problems rather than blame (KK\_PL\_G2\_J), which means

treating actors in conflict with calmness and understanding because a solution for all is the ultimate goal (AH\_PL\_G21\_F, KK\_PL\_G5\_G).

Ultimately, both of these approaches mean that graduates tend to see conflict situations under a different lens; a more pragmatic lens that allows them to tackle a problem more efficiently (MD\_PL\_G4\_P, IQK\_PL\_G2\_N, KK\_PL\_G2\_J, KK\_PL\_G6\_G). In this sense, because of such a mindset, graduates often relate being called upon by other members of the community to solve problems (KK\_PL\_G5\_G, KK\_PL\_G6\_G) and, because of their active

<sup>5</sup> This idea concentrates on evidencing how, in conflict situations, the people involved describe themselves either as heroes, villains or victims, which often is seen to be counterproductive and fails to create a discussion to identify solutions that benefit all parties involved.



inclusion in the community and awareness and engagement with its circumstances and members, graduates are often successful in easily solving such hurdles. In recognition of this importance, conflict resolution is precisely recited as one of the biggest attributes of the role of a peace leader (MD\_PL\_G3\_P, AB\_PL\_G8\_F), as evidenced by the following quote from a graduate in Afghanistan. “The role of peace leader is finding a solution to the problems of people, a leader can help and bring peace in a community” (AB\_PL\_G20\_F).

#### 5.4 Role Model

In addition to being key problem-solvers in their community, graduates also appear as role models; that is, many graduates also actively act in a way that is meant to inspire. For graduates who have become teachers, this is a common reflection, as they tend to strive to demonstrate good habits to their students (AH\_PL\_G22\_F).

In this kind of action, graduates also usually relate that having confidence in themselves and in their critical thinking skills pushes them to show others how to act in a specific circumstance (AH\_PL\_G22\_F). In this sense, they are role models through the transfer of their expertise to their community (KK\_PL\_G9\_J), and perhaps inspire others to do the same. For example, a graduate in Malawi expressed the idea in these terms:



“if you want to change the world, [...] You have to start on your behaviours first. So, I should be an example to my friends. So, when my friends see me doing community work, social works, they should also copy and they will know that this person is really showing a sense of community.”

– MD\_PL\_G3\_P

One way in which graduates’ leadership as role models is expressed was through the cultivation of advocacy skills. Interviewees gave several examples of how they actively engage in pushing certain agendas in their communities and acting towards achieving certain principles, projecting them as role models. This can be exemplified in a number of circumstances: a graduate in Iraq claimed they taught girls to drive cars (IQK\_PL\_G2\_N), another, that they were advocating for girls to have access to school (IQK\_PL\_G3\_M) and the same role was illustrated by another graduate in Afghanistan (AB\_PL\_G4\_F). In Malawi, a third graduate talked about how they were trying to convince parents to let their daughters play sports (MD\_PL\_G3\_P). Gender equality is therefore by far the most prominent social cause in which graduates refer to their roles as advocates and, in this sense, the box below concentrates on the profile and mindset of a graduate in Kenya who was vocal on their advocacy for gender equality.





## Gender Lens: Female graduates as a role model and advocate

Living in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp, a 26-year-old female refugee encapsulates this advocacy and role modelling for gender equality. She states that the course

“empowered me to know that leadership is not only made for one gender but all of us are working towards sustainable development goals, which all agents are working towards achieving in 2030.” (KK\_PL\_G2\_J)

This translated as a responsibility for the graduate to stand and speak for “my fellow women who cannot speak for themselves” (KK\_PL\_G2\_J). She therefore explains that she usually speaks to women about how they can protect themselves against sexual violence, even if she often finds it hard to express and have her ideas heard in a sexist environment; she explains that “those who are finding it hard to accept what we are working for, are men” (KK\_PL\_G2\_J). Expanding upon the challenges she faces, the graduate explains:

“You know where we are now, gender equality is something that is very hard for people to accept. So, when you stand in front and speak as a female, you face a lot and the most frequent issue facing us is ignorance because they will say things like “ahaa ‘underestimation’”; she is just a female and whatever she is saying is just nothing.” (KK\_PL\_G2\_J)

Still, those challenges don't stop her from advocating against sexual violence as she believes that is her role as a peace leader and a way she can support her community.



## 6 Peaceful Communities

Graduates demonstrated servant leadership grounded in an inner peace that drives their actions, ultimately leading to developing peaceful communities through actions aimed at providing interpersonal or social support to others (MD\_PL\_G9\_P). For example, one graduate in Malawi explains:

*"When I was learning about peace leaders, we were learning about the feeling one, I can feel that other person, empathy. So, in the community when I meet such challenges, such as when people face challenges in terms of, let's say, elderly people. An elderly person comes to the bore hole [...] in Dzaleka [...] and that elderly person is not able to draw water from borehole because it needs effort. As a peace leader and someone who learnt to be a peace leader, I can support that elderly person to draw water because those people need support, need help from people who have the power and ability to do some of the works [...]. A sense of community is trying to participate in each and every work and also feel the pain your friend has as your pain so you try to end such pains and you should live peacefully in the community." (MD\_PL\_G3\_P)*

This engagement is brought up in very diverse ways in interviews when graduates explain the projects they take up to help their community. This is exemplified through various projects initiated by graduates, some of which are detailed below:

(1) Graduates in Kenya and Afghanistan created a monthly meeting group with members of the community (in person or via WhatsApp) so as to jointly solve common problems in their community (AB\_PL\_G19\_F)(KK\_PL\_G2\_J).

(2) Graduates in Kenya organise computer skills trainings for the community,

including teenage mothers, and share business advice for future entrepreneurs (KK\_PL\_G2\_J, KK\_PL\_G6\_G).

(3) In Malawi, another graduate acts as an interpreter for people in need at police stations (MD\_PL\_G3\_P).

(4) The same graduate in Malawi also has another initiative where they take food to pregnant women's homes, for those who cannot get it themselves (MD\_PL\_G3\_P).

(5) In Iraq, a graduate created a Facebook group for Syrian refugee engineers, which has grown into an initiative that is both geared towards providing professional mental support, as well as offering English courses. They state:

*"Most people are very happy with this, especially these people in Syria. Now, they are for the [...] refugees in Iraq or in other countries that are not really in that much need but in Syria, they are; they need these kinds of course because life conditions there are very bad and they don't have the money to do it, so this is something free and online." (IQD\_PL\_G2\_A)*

(6) A 25-year-old graduate, who identifies himself as an internally displaced person living in Khanke Camp in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, provided mental health support to members of the Yezidi community, who were persecuted by ISIS around 2014, which resulted in the forced displacement of many Yezidis. The graduate explains that he works with

*"Survivors from the hands of ISIS. So, I facilitate, you know all the meetings and trainings they have and I also interpret for them, translate all the documents and stories they have." (IQK\_PL\_G1\_M)*



Figure 14: Peace Leaders from across JWL learning centres in Iraq gathered in Sulaymaniyah

In addition, he is helping them through traumas they might have experienced and teaching them breathing techniques that he learnt during the course and found helpful in managing his emotions. Besides providing this support, at the time of the interview, he is working on establishing his own teaching centre for survivors. He explains:

*“One of the most important points, is just like teaching survivors, since it’s been years and years. Of course, after the genocide, I know thousands of survivors were, you know,*

*prevented from studying and maybe making their dreams come true. So, I said, at least we can just teach them, you know, language, IT skills, maybe provide some MHPSS [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support] or something.”* (IQK\_PL\_G1\_M)

These graduates demonstrate a drive to act to assist marginalised people who benefit from their support (INS\_PL\_G4\_MHD). By acting as social workers in many roles, graduates thus “serve different people” (MD\_PL\_G4\_P); they represent people who are actively





working towards the betterment of their communities and believe that their own interventions can help to contribute to that goal (MD\_PL\_G9\_P). Such initiatives therefore demonstrate the extent to which graduates are active members of their communities, engaged in trying to support those around them in a constructive manner, ultimately working so that the environment in which they live allows

peaceful coexistence. In this sense, while focusing on different avenues, all of the initiatives and ways of acting explained above concentrate on the ultimate goal of social assistance and the creation of harmony, which together result in the second main outcome of community peacebuilding.



## 7 Conclusion



“[...] because by acquiring the knowledge and the skill that I was given, I'm able to transmit it the same. The course is not only changing me, but it's changing community through me. Whereby, what I have acquired, I'm able to execute to the community. I'm able to make sure people are in peace, people are able to understand one another, people are able to respect and people are able to coexist despite differences.”

– KK\_PL\_G9\_JP

The quote above is a good representation of one of the main outcomes of the course in a process whereby graduates become drivers of community peacebuilding; they involve themselves in the cause of making sure people around them are at peace and

able to interact respectfully. While that peacebuilding outcome is supported by technical knowledge learned through the Peace Leader programme, this report attempted to demonstrate that the development of these skills for graduates is also built upon and mainly supported by a process of personal transformation and building an empowered mindset that allows graduates to achieve inner peace, servant leadership and ultimately community peacebuilding.

In this sense, both knowing themselves better and believing in their thinking and interactive abilities, leads students to feel at peace with themselves and accepting and being confident in their personalities and capabilities, which enables them to create healthy relationships not only with themselves but also their surroundings. Hence, achieving inner peace also inspires and empowers students to act as servant leaders and pursue the ultimate goal of building peaceful and harmonious communities.





## Key points

- Graduates find inner peace during their studies through a personal transformation, which made them more self-aware, self-controlled and self-confident individuals, as well as through the development of a new mindset, empowered by the confidence in their critical, interreligious and intercultural thinking.
- Graduates explain how the programme allowed them to nurture their servant leadership, which ultimately empowered them to become agents of change, promoting peace and harmony in their community.
- Graduates act as role models in their communities as they become points of reference in solving community issues. This inspire other community members to join their efforts in nurturing peaceful communities.



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