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About Young Leaders Conference

Young Leaders Conference (YLC) is the premier leadership development program for motivated young individuals from across Pakistan. This 6-day leadership journey provides an out-of-classroom learning experience and a rigorous curriculum that equips participants with the confidence, independence, skills and global competitiveness required of the next generation of future leaders. They get the opportunity to broaden their perspectives by interacting with well-known leaders in the business, social, cultural and public sectors. In addition, they participate in activities such as panel discussions, thematic intervention sessions, entrepreneurial spotlights, simulations, field trips, cultural events, summit debates etc. By living together, they learn empathy and patience. They listen to each other and acquire an appreciation of human diversity, opinions and insights. YLC is a tough program that allows the youth to stretch and discover their adaptability, empowering them to become contributing members of society.

YLC 2015 – Theme and Context

YLC 2015 revolved around the theme of “Regeneration”. The concept was meant to challenge the recycled narrative of ideals that is ingrained in the consciousness of our youth over the years. To overcome their disillusionment with the process of change, the theme was designed to initiate a process whereby prejudices & preconceived notions were shed. There was an emphasis on issues of urgent concern that tend to remain unaddressed such as gender disparity, cultural identity & societal taboos. Like every year, YLC combined pro-active training and capacity building with insightful sessions & simulations that led to shedding the comfort zone and grooming young adults for professional life. The program endeavored to de-formalise learning patterns, familiarize participants with alternate arguments on key issues, and empower them to become ambassadors for greater social justice and equality.
Participant Demographics

At YLC 2015, the mix of participants represented 53 cities, towns and villages including remote areas like Lakki Marwat (KPK), Vehari, Awaran, Lasbela (Balochistan), Mirpur Mathelo (Sindh), Gilgit Baltistan, Kot Addu (Punjab) and many others. The majority of the participants hailed from cities like Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar with a diverse
August 11th - Day One

Theme: Rebirth (Endeavor)

The first phase of the six day journey encapsulated the idea of shedding old beliefs and wiping the slate clean to emerge with an attitude of openness. The day was sponsored by English Biscuit Manufacturers, a long-standing partner of School of Leadership.

Participant Arrival & Registrations

The punctuality and dedication of the participants was evident on Day One with 90% of the participants arriving and registering before 10 am. To keep the participants’ energy levels high, the Youth Facilitators conducted some ice breakers, energizers and group activities ensuring there was never a dull moment.
The conference was formally kicked off with Mr. Kamran Rizvi, Founding Director of SoL, giving a welcome note that had the audience engaged and amused. He spoke about extracting the most out of life and making each day memorable emphasizing that being young was not just an age but an attitude. He gave an overview of the spirit of YLC presenting YLC statistics over the years. The atmosphere took on a more somber note as Mr. Rizvi spoke about someone whose association with School of Leadership and whose impact on the world would never be forgotten, paying tribute to Nadeem Chawhan – a renowned speaker & trainer and a dear friend to SoL.

Mr. Rizvi took to the stage to acknowledge the sponsors & partners without whom the Conference would not have been possible including English Biscuit Manufacturers (also the Lead Sponsor for Day 1), British Council, US Embassy, Habitt, Dubai Islamic Bank, Kuch Khaas, ACM Gold, Falcon-I, TPL, Thal, FNF, FFC, KAPCO, Premier Oil, UN Women, NUST, Education USA, Jang, FM 89 & TCS. This was followed by a short talk by Owais Malik from City FM 89 who spoke about stepping up and taking part in your own destiny.
Mr. Zulfiqar Ansari from EBM was invited to speak a few words. He stressed the importance of events like YLC, elaborating on the well-established relationship between SoL and EBM creating a positive impact together. He presented a rousing video by EBM revolving around the theme of unused potential & how potential that is not tapped into remains in danger of being wasted. The video ended on an exhilarating note encouraging the participants to “regenerate”. This was followed by Mr. Umair Jaliawala, CEO School of Leadership, talking about SoL founders and finding the right teachers at the right age.

Inauguration Ceremony

The Inauguration Ceremony was a thrilling and dramatic affair. It kicked off with a video showing uplifting highlights from YLC 2014. With lights out, phones in the air & a smoke effect that added an air of anticipation, the Chief Guest Mr. Asad Umar entered to the sound of resounding applause. This was followed by a monologue of Allama Iqbal’s ‘Khudi’ performed by Hassan Abbas and the Management Team and Youth Facilitators joining him on stage singing Soni Dharti followed by the national anthem. Mr. Asad Umar, Senior-Vice President of PTI and an ardent supporter of SoL’s work, was invited to the stage to address the participants. Peppered with entertaining anecdotes he stressed in his speech that taking risks pays off.

He shared his personal experiences as CEO of Engro Corp explaining that when Engro Foods was launched it had huge competition but by the time he stepped down as CEO, it had accumulated 75% of the market share. He emphasized to the participants that they should not let anything suppress their entrepreneurial spirit. His speech was followed by a cake cutting ceremony in which all the sponsors, partners and YLC team members participated enthusiastically.
**Mentoring Sessions**

Participants were divided into groups and assigned T-shirt colors & Youth Facilitators for the next six days. Each group got an opportunity to have a one on one mentoring session with an expert, discussing their challenges and concerns and receiving some insightful guidance. They got the opportunity to draw from the experience and wisdom of these mentors and learn more about each other in the process.

**Team Building**

To give the participants a chance to bond with each other and shed their initial inhibitions, Mr. Umair Jaliawala conducted various team building activities with all the participants. He explained that the concept was for them to get rid of the layers that hold them back from doing the things they want to or being “too cool” to participate which may eventually mean becoming “too cool” to succeed.
Dinner had a new flavor as five representatives from the US Embassy joined the day’s program to share their expertise, experiences & opportunities with the participants. As hosts, they did not just address the participants from the stage but interacted with them in groups answering their questions and providing clarity on the relationship between the two countries. Some of the topics talked about included bilateral ties between the countries, possibilities beyond what we see in the news and cultural exchanges. As the representatives mingled with the participants they spoke about the US being a country of immigrants and answered a number of questions about education exchange opportunities. One of the representatives spoke about the determination of Pakistani youth highlighting the fact that unlike many youngsters in the US who often have things handed to them, Pakistani youngsters are willing to work for their success. This interaction added a new dimension of motivation and encouragement to the first day of the participants’ regeneration journey.
After an action packed day, Mr. Kamran Rizvi gave the participants some food for thought reflecting upon various aspects of life, human contact, the contradiction between relationships and taking personal responsibility. This gave them a chance to contemplate over the proceedings of the day and develop a more profound understanding of some of the more complex elements of life.

Capacity Building – the Human Factor

As the day inched closer to conclusion, the participants had opened up to each other more and continued to be fully engrossed in the proceedings. This permitted Ms Saima Khan, Founding Director SoL, and Ms Urooj Mazhar, Director SoL, to conduct a segment on the aims of YLC; its norms; how to conduct oneself as leaders at such a forum; the requirements of living together in a hotel, what is at the heart of YLC and how to make the most of it. Featuring a quiz along with some fun activities this interactive segment served as an energy booster closing the day on a high note.
August 12th - Day Two

Theme: The Resolution (International Youth Day)

A celebration of International Youth Day, the second day at YLC was sponsored by the British Council. Cognizant of the theme of youth civic engagement, the day incorporated a number of different speakers, activities and discussions revolving around the concepts of determination and the resolution to battle out all odds. With an aim towards helping participants decipher their present the day was also focused on helping them discover a purpose for their future.

‘International Youth Day’

Ms. Urooj Mazhar started the day off on an energetic note asking the participants to share their learnings from the previous day. Sprinkled with humor this was an engaging conversation that allowed them to share their perspectives and learn from each other.
Addressing the theme of International Youth Day this was a panel discussion featuring some prominent experts and thought leaders. Moderated by Mr. Shahzad Khan, Founding Director of Chanan Development Association, the panel featured Ms. Nighat Rizvi, Co-Founder of Amal Human Development Network, Mr. Qadeer Baig, Country Representative for Rutgers WPF and Ms. Shazia Khawar from the British Council. The discussion revolved around a number of youth issues specifically addressing the fact that the Millennium Development Goals as well as the government’s Vision 2025 do not take into account the youth. The topics of gender, education, early marriage, child sexual abuse were also delved into with the panelists providing some real insight from their experiences and work.

Shazia Khawar from the British Council emphasized that young people in Pakistan have demonstrated their willingness to make a difference, given the opportunity to do so, quoting various examples from the projects British Council has initiated for young individuals in Pakistan. She spoke about Active Citizens – a program run by the British Council that functions in 90 districts across Pakistan to open doors for smaller, marginalized communities. The panel wrapped up with a question and answer session where participants sought more clarification on issues like child sexual abuse specifically keeping in mind the recent Kasur scandal.
Carrying forward the theme of youth civic engagement, the participants piled into buses for a visit to the Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform. There was a distinguished panel of speakers at the ministry including Mr. Asim Khan, Special Assistant to the Minister, General Zahir Shah, Project Director of China Pakistan Economic Corridor, Ms. Faiza Inayat from the British Council and Mr. Kamran Rizvi. The aim of British Council NextGen reports and the government’s Vision 2025 is to bring to the forefront the opinions and perspectives of young individuals and allow them to influence social and legal policy. Both programs involve academicians, media personalities, journalists and the like. The aim is to provide a conceptual platform to result in concrete action for sustainable and inclusive growth that will spur human, social and economic development.

Hence, combining the impact of the British Council’s Next Generation reports and the government’s vision 2025, the panel spoke about the various ways that youth involvement could take place to enhance the vision. The discussion focused on giving the youth a voice in the discourse on critical issues and creating opportunities to increase their participation. The session also deliberated on what measures to this end the research series has highlighted, and how we, as a nation, must move forward with the vision of an empowered youth. General Zahir Shah briefed the participants on the long term effects of CPEC and the possibility of young individuals steering CPEC projects. The panel discussion was followed by an activity where the delegates made pledges to empower and be empowered on a blank canvas where they also signed their names.
Upon returning to the Marriott Hotel, there was a line-up of some remarkable personalities who came and addressed the participants talking about various themes related to International Youth Day.

Dr. Tahir Hijazi

Representing the Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform, Dr. Hijazi spoke about initiating a process of reforms in order to create a system that has accountability and takes responsibility. He highlighted the fact that the young population could effectively be involved in peace building and interfaith dialogue. Laying emphasis on civil service reforms, he elaborated on Project Uraan and how it aims to use performance measurement as a means of creating more accountability.

Dr. Quratulain Bakhteari

Nobel Peace Prize Nominee and a leading advocate in the domains of education, sanitation, women empowerment & professional development of young people, Dr. Bakhteari’s talk, though brief, proved to be extremely meaningful for the participants. Culminating in a standing ovation, Dr. Bakhteari’s speech steered the participants through issues of cultural identity, the dichotomy between wealth & poverty and the complications of challenges faced by the young generation of the 21st century.
Education Minister of Punjab, Mr. Rana Mashhood joined the Youth Day celebrations at YLC expounding upon a vision where no child would be out of school. He stressed to the participants that their talent and potential were unlimited and given the right platform, they could achieve anything they set their minds to. He briefed the participants about the Punjab Education Endowment fund and even extended an invitation for SoL and British Council sponsored participants to visit Lahore offering the government’s hospitality and support.

Ms. Faiza Inayat from the British Council made a compelling case for the youth of the country to realize how powerful they are. Taking into account the theme of civic engagement she conjured up a convincing strategy for young people to find reasons to mobilize, to step up to claim their rights, to develop new methods of communication and to demand attention to issues that specifically affect them. She also provided a brief insight on how the work of the British Council was aimed towards building young people’s capacity for reflexive action in more innovative ways.
Policy Dialogue

Divided into groups, the delegates were given a chance to reflect upon all the themes that had been touched upon by the various speakers. Each group was provided with a topic by the British Council to focus their discussion on. Moderated by the Youth Facilitators, the participants used dialogue and discussion as tools to develop viable solutions for critical issues such as education, right to information, youth participation in policy making, youth involvement in community building and various other topics. At the end of the discussion each group presented their solutions and possible plan of action.

Time to Act

Ms. Asma Jahangir, Pakistan’s leading human rights activist, gave a deeply insightful talk to the participants. She spoke about the law and order situation, the resilience of Pakistani people, fighting for women’s rights and the freedom of thought and expression. She stressed that despite all odds and negativity, Pakistan was lucky enough to have people still willing to fight for the right causes. Her talk was met with a huge round of applause leaving the participants with a lot to reflect on in terms of the kind of action they could take as the younger generation.
In this segment, participants got an opportunity to meet diplomats from different countries. The young Vice Councilor from the Russian Embassy talked about cultural ties between the two countries and even spoke a few words of Urdu to the participant’s surprise and delight. Mr. Sandor Mihalko, Counselor from the Embassy of Hungary, also added a few words about the direction he envisioned for the two countries.

The segment ended with Ms. Ina Lepel, the German Ambassador, addressing the audience and speaking on a number of topics including women marginalization, minorities and youth opportunities, specifically within Germany.
In the spirit of International Youth Day, the program made way for the youth to raise their own voice about issues close to their hearts or the ones that held significance for them. They did this through creative expression by performing short skits and various other performances on multiple issues. Some of the topics addressed included sexual harassment, gender stereotyping, suicide, patriotism, martyrdom, addiction, nepotism and corruption. This allowed them to filter out the issues that really made a difference to them and project them through their own lens.
Participants were given a chance to listen to different stances from political figures and make up their own minds about how to shape their political views or perspective of the country.

**Mr. Farooq Sattar**

A senior member of Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Dr Farooq Sattar, started by saying that YLC was a ray of hope against the dark clouds of passivism that threatened to overwhelm the country. He confessed that him and his contemporaries had been unable to preserve Quaid’s Pakistan. He said that he had full confidence that if the political process put faith in the youth they would be able to do what all the current politicians had failed to – save Quaid’s Pakistan.

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**Hasan Sardar**

The Head of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf’s (PTI) Youth Wing, Hasan Sardar joined the youth day celebrations adding a different kind of energy to the hall. With chants of ‘tabdeeli’ (change) and a promise that the youth were the salvation that the country needed, his brief talk left the participants in high spirits.
Day two and International Youth Day celebrations wrapped up with a capacity building session with two celebrity youth icons – Mr. Yousuf Bashir Qureshi and Mr. Hamza Ali Abbasi. Mr. Abbasi, a renowned actor who is very vocal on current issues, spoke about his perspective on patriotism and taking ownership of Pakistan. He also shared his views on true leadership and how leaders deal with fears. Mr. Yousuf Bashir Qureshi, a world recognized fashion designer, took the participants on a profound journey of self-discovery. In his soft voice, he addressed topics like identity, dealing with grief and fear. He used his personal experiences and his own interpretations to give the participants some new perspectives on life.
August 13th - Day Three

Theme: The Renaissance (Arts & Culture)

As the sun dawned on Day three of YLC, the participants continued to be in high spirits. Revolving around the theme of Renaissance, the idea behind the day’s activities was to allow the young individuals to delve deeper into themes of arts and culture and how they tied in with concepts such as identity.

The Renaissance

A well known trainer and talk show host with years of experience in the training world, Ms. Asma Mustafa Khan was the Day Champ for the third day. She started out on a spirited note relating anecdotes about shedding the old and being open to accepting the new. This was followed by an activity where participants demonstrated their creativity and ingenuity by using scotch tape and paper to build bridges. The lessons they drew from this were many especially the fact that time is the most important and expensive resource.
The Cult(ure) of Science

After an exciting morning, the participants settled down to listen to a talk by distinguished nuclear physicist, Dr. Pervez Hoodb hoy. He highlighted the fact that science is the common heritage of all humankind, not one particular religion or culture. He went on to elaborate that although on the surface, it may appear that science and culture are diametrical opposites; however, upon closer inspection, one finds that they are mutually dependent. The evolution of scientific thought in society has historically been fashioned by the cultural context within which it exists. The primary tenets of scientific cultural; originality, independence of thought and dissent, defy established cultural values. The development of today’s free and democratic societies has been strongly influenced by these ideals.

Tackling Taboo

A huge advocate of women’s rights and author of ‘Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area’, Dr Fouzia Saeed unravelled stereotypical ideas of antiquated gender archetypes. In her talk she explored the various dimensions of social identity and its discontents, breaking down these obscure notions for the uninitiated. From societal pressures to cultural pride, honor killings and sexual harassment, she provided her own unique perspective on these issues.
Cultural Identity Crises

The day took a humorous turn as Mustufa and Murtuza Chaudary of Banana News Network (BNN) fame took the stage to speak about the very crucial quest for a lost national identity. Sprinkled with comical impressions and witty remarks, they explored the seeds of Pakistan’s cultural identity crises talking about all the root causes of the dilemma. The session successfully initiated a consciousness among the participants to encourage them to come out of their fixated state and gain distinct social standing in the global world.
Congruent to the theme of arts and culture, after lunch the participants boarded buses to five different destinations. Each one represented a certain historical, artistic or cultural aspect of Islamabad or Pakistan. These included:

- Saidpur Village
- Shah Faisal Mosque
- Pakistan Monument Museum
- Kuch Khaas
- Lok Virsa

Each group learnt the significance of the place they visited, its position in a historical or cultural context, its role in the capital’s ecosystem and its goals. They were briefed on how each place starts with a purpose and comes into being due to the strength of this purpose and what each represents or stands for.

After completing the cultural tours, the buses made their way to National University of Science and Technology where participants were meant to spend the next three days. The girls checked into the female dormitories while the boys checked into the male dormitories. Participants were given a few hours to settle in and get ready for dinner.
During this time, the YLC teams prepared for the dinner, which was to be a simulation titled ‘ExtraCorp’, implying Extraordinary Cooperation. When the participants returned, each one was assigned a disability. Some were blindfolded; others had their hands tied together or one hand tied to the leg etc. In this way, they had to crawl, limp or feel their way to the dining area. None of the participants complained about the disability given to them; instead they at once fell into the disposition they were assigned and started behaving accordingly.

The participants did their best to cope with their disabilities with many trying to help others along with the YLC team members. Many sat on the floor, on one level. There was no more any distinction of gender or status; everyone was in the same boat struggling to get a few morsels into their mouths. This carried on for over an hour. Though some participants finished their food early yet they would not untie their bands; they wanted more time to experience and to learn to empathize with those millions around the world who suffer and live difficult lives because of a disability.

Umair Jaliawala led a heart-wrenching debrief on the simulation. A simple opening question; “What did you feel?” was enough to start the tears pouring; the pained voices expressed their anguish about the experience; the deep and moving lessons they learnt; the admittance to their actual blindness to the blind and lame; acknowledging their state of apathy and complacency, their selfish existences; how good it feels to be useful, to make someone happy.

A visually impaired participant shared his own life experiences followed by a wheelchair bound participant who spoke about his journey towards accepting his reality. Another moving story shared by a female participant really shook the rest – she pointed out that there are times when you’re physically functioning but paralyzed by circumstances. As the powerfully moving simulation wrapped, delegates embraced each other and let out their emotions, holding on to their newfound realizations of gratitude.
Independence Celebrations

With emotions still running high, the participants were given a chance to get an early start on Independence Day celebrations. Waving Pakistani flags and flickering candles adding beauty to the darkness of the night, they enthusiastically sang patriotic songs. As the clock struck twelve, Asma Mustafa Khan introduced a surprise guest. Muniba Mazari, an artist and a young motivational speaker, sang a beautiful rendition of 'Ye watan tumhara hai'. She spoke to the participants about the fact that the change all the leaders kept talking about was personified in the existence of the youth. She encouraged them to move away from dependence and step up to steer their own destinies without complaining.

With national songs still playing in their ears, the participants made their way back to their dorms after an action-packed day.
With renewed vigor and enthusiasm, the participants got ready for day four of YLC. They made their way from the dorms to the NUST auditorium in coasters as Umair Jaliawala, the Champ for the day, prepared to commence on an enlightening note. He took the stage giving participants an overview of what to expect during the course of the day further enhancing their anticipation.

The first session of the day was a keynote by Lt. General Asad Durrani. Ex-Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Pakistan Army’s Military Intelligence, Umair introduced Mr. Asad Durrani with the contention that he would not only present a case for Pakistan’s past but also for the future. Mr. Durrani started out by explaining that young Pakistanis have always received the garbled versions of the country’s reality through external forces. He set the stage for the participants to question what has been bothering them about their country and its future. The discussion forged its way from the national to international political status and image of Pakistan. From the viability of the democratic system to new perspectives on terrorism and the media Mr. Durrani’s talk was followed by numerous thought provoking questions by the participants.
With the keynote concluding, Umair Jaliawala introduced the panelists for the next discussion. They included Dr. Tahir Masood, Professor & Chairman of Department of Mass Communications at the University of Karachi; Mr. Abbas Husain, recognized teacher trainer and educator; Mr. Shahzad Nawaz, celebrated actor, producer and designer, and Ms. Saima Khan, Founding Director SoL.

The discussion was moderated by Mr. Umair Jaliawala and aimed to recognize and internalize all the recent social problems faced by Pakistanis, to confer it with vigor and enthusiasm, and finally, to discover a plausible solution that can be put into motion by the young generation of the country. Revolving around the concepts of history, identity and self, the discussion took a philosophical turn. Giving the participants a reality check Shahzad Nawaz talked about the distinction between patriotism and nationalism and the idea of history being altered to suit political agendas.
As the afternoon progressed, the participants were given a choice between four different breakout sessions. Each session was conducted by an expert in the subject area. Facilitators of these thematic interventions began with definitions and examples to provide conceptual clarity on terminology and continued by expounding further on the subject at hand. In smaller groups, participants had an opportunity to get more questions answered and get a more firm grasp on complex concepts.

Ali Abbas Zaidi, an activist and CEO of Pakistan Youth Alliance, conducted a session where he delved deeper into the famous revolutions of the world along with the transformations they brought with them. He pointed out that patterns like male supremacy and patriarchy were not just rampant in Pakistan but drawing from historical evidence, it was apparent that such issues had existed in almost all societies over the years.

Shahzad Nawaz used his experience with the media industry to explain how he has managed to remain relevant in the media and how he has overcome the challenges he faced in the battle for value over wealth. He revealed how most media conglomerates follow strict conventions focused on making money which has turned media outlets into little more than businesses that manipulate and exploit the truth to maximize profits and minimize loss. His point was that such behavior has in its entirety made the media little more than another tool for furthering the interests of one section of society and marginalizing the rest. He emphasized that it was essential now more than ever for non-conformist thought, for innovative thinkers and pioneers to take the media in a new direction.
Reclaim the System

In this session, Dr Tahir Masood spoke about the dangers of the youth of our country being disempowered and relegated to the sidelines when it comes to the decision making process. He reminisced about a time when youth activism and participation in civic engagement was at the forefront explaining that there has, since then, been a gradual process of systematic de-politicization and detachment from the political process. He stressed that it was high time for youth to become self-aware again, to recognize the power they hold and the part they play in the transformation of society. He also addressed how youth participation and advocacy can make a difference, and how young people can take back the power they are so dearly owed.

Elements of Thinking

In this thought provoking session, Abbas Husain discussed the many key factors that come together for the growth and development of ideas and are essential for the ability to analyze and deconstruct in order to be conducive to critical thinking. He also emphasized how important it was to be open to the opinions of others, and to unravel different perspectives. Introducing the idea that every influential school of thought has been a synthesis of a thesis and antithesis he pointed out that without opposition and disagreement, ideas do not grow. He explored the various methods through which these elements could be employed for the young individuals to become great and innovative thinkers.
Mr. Jamshed Kazi, UN Women Representative in Pakistan, who has worked on a number of gender rights campaigns with the UN, delved deeper into issues related to gender role and gender identity and what that means for young people living in the world today. Talking about the UN’s HeforShe campaign, he helped the audience discover how they could control their gender identity through discourse and dialogue. He conducted a very interesting exercise that demonstrated the effects of victim blaming in cases of sexual harassment and domestic abuse. He emphasized that it was time to shed old stereotyped and antiquated gender identities, and to recognize how heteronormative ideals have led to marginalization of not only women, but of men as well. He closed the session by giving the participants a question to reflect on “On Independence Day, ask yourselves do you really have the independence to make choices that affect the rest of your life?”
With a long day of listening to speakers, this simulation got the participants out of the auditorium into the open. The simulation aimed to instill an awareness or at least plant the seeds of consciousness about some of the most taboo issues in our society – these included topics of sexuality, harassment, reproductive rights, gender issues, sexual orientation and various others that are rarely ever addressed or only talked about behind closed doors. Conducted by Umair Jaliawala, this compelling simulation involved each participant getting a character. The character had his/her own unique story, set of problems, distinctive family background and other traits. Through various trigger questions asked by Umair the participants were allowed to build a story around their protagonist putting themselves in the shoes of that person as they did so. What kind of education did the person have? Was it possible for the person to confide in their family or friends? Did the person have the freedom to make his/her own decisions?

As they visualized their character’s transformation into a person, Umair explained to them the concept of a Privilege Walk. Based on the answer to a specific question, participants had to take steps forward or backward. Despite the fact that all of them started at the same point, each one ended up at a completely different location. This conjured up some stark realizations in terms of the disparity in the treatment of the same issues for those who belonged to privileged backgrounds as compared to those who didn’t. During the entire simulation, participants had tape across their mouths signifying how the voices of these victims are suppressed with no opportunity to talk about the troubles they face. On Umair’s cue, the participants removed the tape but words were difficult to articulate. There was a piercing silence as the profound realizations from the activity sunk in. Given a chance to share their reactions, participants were emotional and immensely moved. Many spoke about the fact that it was society’s refusal to accept people who were different that pushed such people to drastic measures like suicide. This was followed by a brief talk by Ms. Nida Mush-taq, a sexual rights activist who has worked with human rights advocacy and development organizations such as Rutgers WPF, Save the Children and UNICEF. She asked some insightful questions such as “Who decides who fits into our society & who doesn’t?” emphasizing that it was time to stop giving character judgments.

This soul-stirring simulation left them with many questions to ponder and reflect upon as they made their way back to the dorms to get dressed for dinner. In Umair’s words, “If you’re left with questions about these themes that’s good. YLC is not a place for closure, it’s a place for exposure.”
Thematic Dinner – Masquerade

Further amplifying the day’s themes of freedom, choice and dealing with prejudices, the dinner was a masquerade. Participants were given masks which they had to wear and lead conversations without giving away their real identities. The idea was for them to get to know each other without any judgments, to leave behind differences and to initiate a process of acceptance. Participants shared a number of insights from the activity e.g. that fact that it was easier to talk to others when they could not see your face, that they did not feel judged, that being unknown made them more comfortable and how they realized the ways in which they permitted biases to color their opinions.

Capacity Building: The Freedom Gift

The late night capacity building session post-dinner was conducted by Mr. Abbas Husain. Using the example of the education system, he highlighted how we as a nation are focused on what we cannot achieve rather than the opposite. He pinpointed that we needed to recognize a national obsession with weakness and start asking questions about the strengths. This was followed by an activity where he asked the participants to list down their strengths. Sharing his wisdom about intentions and silence being the antidote to the noise of the world, he asked the participants to use the opportunity of Independence Day to give a “freedom gift” to the nation in the form of the strengths they had listed during the activity.

Day four and Independence Day celebrations came to a patriotic close, first with a heartwarming video played by Abbas Husain followed by the participants standing up in respect to the national anthem.

This activity enabled them to learn the concept of how their identity is formed and how to use this concept to continuously improve who they are and what they can become.
August 15th - Day Five

Theme: The Reinstatement (Economics)

Despite four days with late nights, sleep deprivation and physical and mental faculties being stretched to the max, the participant’s energy was just as high on the fifth day. With the prospect of new learning and experiences they arrived dressed sharply in formal outfits in keeping with the day’s theme. The day was sponsored by EBM and led by Torque trainer, Mr. Uzair Ausaf who started out on a high note.

Entrepreneurship Spotlights

Featuring guests prominent in their respective fields, specifically in terms of their entrepreneurship experience, this segment brought together some innovative thinkers who shared their wisdom with the participants. Each one shared his/her story allowing the participants to draw insights from their lives and then opening up the floor for them to ask their own questions.

Dr. Murtaza Taj

Dr. Murtuza Taj of Groopic fame talked about the app, the initial success, the time spent in Silicon Valley and the realizations along the way. He talked about the importance of a plan laying out the sustainability of apps & why initial success may not guarantee success in the long run. He also gave the participants some pointers when dealing with potential funders saying that a live demo & a rock star team could make or break a pitch.
Abdullah Ahmed Khan

More commonly known by his alias ‘Sanki King’, Abdullah Ahmed Khan is the Pioneer of Graffiti Art, Calligraffiti, Sticker Art, Sneaker Art & B-boying in Pakistan. His journey from being a quiet, misunderstood kid at school struggling to deal with the loss of both parents to becoming a successful artist who chose to follow his passions and the spiritual connections formed on the way had the participants on a roller coaster of emotions. His talk ended in a standing ovation with the delegates acknowledging the impact of his powerful tale.

Saad Hamid

A digital maestro & community mobilizer with a heart for innovation and impact, Saad Hamid had quite an entertaining story to share with the participants. With some hilarious examples, popular culture references and a lot of inspiration, the talk was both enlightening and elevating adding a lighter tone to the proceedings. He wrapped up with the advice that they should start with an idea, stay positive and keep hoping that one day the dots would connect.
Jaweria Sethi

25 year old educationist and founder of Edopia - a school that functions with the idea that learning happens everywhere Jaweria shared her perspective on the current education system and why it was in such dire need of transformation. She talked about all the challenges she faced in setting up the school and the initial few weeks spent establishing it. Participants had many questions about the kind of recognition the school had received and the future direction it was planning to take.

Winning the Battle of Hearts & Minds

A YLC alumnus, Mr. Abdullah Khurram is a South Asia & Middle East Fellow at PoliTact and a Strategic Advisor at Gulf State Analytics. His session revolved around the idea that in order to fully realize one’s potential, an individual must develop the ability to think strategically so that one can form connections between life’s goals and the broader social, national, and global objectives. The session covered some important areas including how to rebuild Pakistan’s global narrative, how to make sure we’re perceived the way we want, how to think strategically by linking our micro-projects to global goals, and how to develop people to people and business to business ties throughout the world. In doing so, the speaker engaged with the audience to perform a national SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) Analysis and discussed some best practices from around the world, so that the very finest of them could be brought home to Pakistan.
Serial Entrepreneurship

An internationally renowned visual thinker, Silicon Valley serial entrepreneur turned international entrepreneurial program designer, educator, and entrepreneurial community builder, Sean Griffin added a unique flavor to the day’s program with his years of experience. Addressing the audience with regard to not just how to become a successful entrepreneur, but how to turn that energy and passion into a string of successes, to build on and grow from the first triumph into an entrepreneurship mogul, he gave a lot of useful concepts for the participants to apply to their lives. The session ended on a beautiful note with Mr. Griffin doing live visual brainstorming illustrating the participants ideas about the challenges and opportunities associated with entrepreneurship. This activity enabled them to learn the concept of how their identity is formed and how to use this concept to continuously improve who they are and what they can become.

Shashkay Kum, Flavor Zyada

A breath of fresh air and bucket loads of entertainment, this activity gave the participants a chance to develop an awareness of the talents that set them apart. Based on the tagline of EBM’s Rio, the concept was that in a world rife with superficiality and an unhealthy obsession with what is on the surface, it was for the youth to take back the center stage from gaudy triviality of the apparent and focus on what was underneath. Conducting the activity, Umair Jaliawala asked the participants to choose one talent they wanted to display to the world and collect ‘likes’ in the form of stickers. Umair emphasized that the purpose of the exercise was to see who each person really was since each human being had his/her own unique code and was different in their own way. Participants became even more active and energized as the activity drew to a close.
Muhammad Talha, a representative from Mobilink, took the stage to give the participants some interesting tips about dealing with interviews. He showed them the interviewer’s perspective describing, in a humorous manner, the different types of personalities one can come across in an interview.

This was followed by mock interviews conducted by representatives from Participants were to be assessed on their approach and pitch during future grilling job interviews. They were prepared to fill inventories so as to learn how behavioral assessments are done. The process allowed them to learn better decision making for entry into the corporate sector. Participants were immersed into a real-life interview situation and got feedback on what they did well as well as what they could have done differently. They took this exercise very seriously. Since they had been told that this exercise would happen during YLC, they had brought along their CVs, job applications and educational qualification certificates and were attired in formal garb.
Once the interview simulation had ended, the participants took their seats back in the auditorium where a representative from Education USA had arrived to talk to them. In this engaging session the concept of transformative education was discussed and participants came up with various solutions to make the prevalent system of education more transformative. The representative also enlightened the audience about the number of opportunities offered by the organization as well as the ways in which they could get involved and take advantage of these.

Cultural Dinner

As the economics-themed day inched closer to dinner, participants got an opportunity to change out of their formal wear into their cultural attire. With 53 cities from across Pakistan represented at the conference, the beauty in diversity was clearly visible in the gorgeous outfits the participants chose to wear.
The conference’s last late-night session was conducted by Mr. Kamran Rizvi. Despite a long day, the participants’ enthusiasm was a sight to witness as Mr. Rizvi started the talk. Many complex issues were simplified and a number of topics were addressed including leadership, handling difficult situations and the vast potential of the human brain. Using interesting theories and models to explicate on these concepts, Mr. Rizvi closed the session on an inspiring note leaving the participants with the thought that their life was their message to the world.
August 16th - Day Six

Theme: The Reconnect (Social Enterprise)

With a beautiful, cloudy morning that was almost poetic in its metaphorical representation of the overwhelming set of emotions the final day brought with it, day 6 kicked off on a lively note. Waqar Ali, the champ for the day, set the participants off on a journey of responsibility by putting the power in the hands of the participants making them the regulators of their own behavior.

Meet YLC Stars

In this segment, YLC alumni were invited to take the spotlight and present their stories. They spoke about their life changing YLC experiences and how being a part of the conference had empowered them to achieve the success they had managed to acquire. The names included Amir Zahoor, who talked about the impact YLC had on his life and how it encouraged him to step up for his community. He was followed by Khadeeja Khan, who is now a Director at SoL. Khadeeja shared the many challenges and hurdles she had faced along the way and how she managed to deal with each one. Two individuals, who were not there in person had recorded videos where they gave profoundly wise life advice to the participants.
The spotlight session demonstrated how YLC Alumni are making a mark all over Pakistan in simple, yet effective ways. This laid the foundation for the Social Enterprise Planning session where Ms. Urooj Mazhar invited the participants to think about what they would do upon returning to their communities. What makes YLC unique is that certificates are not presented to participants on the last day but rather after 3 months once they’ve submitted project reports detailing the kind of social action they initiated in their communities. Ms. Mazhar explained the concept behind social enterprise projects to the participants. They were told that templates for proposal submissions would be made available on the Sol website. The audience asked questions to ensure they understood the requirements and processes. Some ideas were also shared as the young minds started working on what they plan to do. There was already excitement that there was so much to be done. They were then given some time to break out into groups or as individuals to do some brainstorming for their post conference projects. Some came back with more questions and the excitement of sharing their ideas with the rest.

Waqar Ali, YLC 2015 Manager, took over to begin the closing session. One by one he invited those who had worked for YLC and brought it to this point, asking them to come to the stage. The audience applauded them all, giving standing ovations. These were:

- The Youth Facilitators
- The Management Team
- The NUST administration
- The Event Management Company, Glitz; including the audio/visual teams
- The Marriott Hotel team

All the sponsors were named and gratitude expressed for their sincere and dedicated involvement. Participants also got an opportunity to watch their six day journey in action as a video montage of the conference days was projected onto the screen. Participants continuously cheered during this presentation as they saw themselves in the pictures. For the final closing, the stage was decorated with YLC plaques, sponsored by TCS. This has become an annual TCS gift that it awards to the YLCians of that year. Each participant was awarded a plaque that represented the meaningful six-day journey.