



CASTrips

CAS Trips' CAS Project Challenge - Empowering Global Youth for Sustainable Development

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The CAS Project Challenge (CPC) by CAS Trips represents a groundbreaking approach to experiential learning framed within the International Baccalaureate (IB) community. Designed to empower students to address local challenges in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the CPC has grown from an on-trip activity into a global movement. This initiative is now a beacon of collaboration, innovation, and tangible impact, driving sustainable development across diverse communities worldwide.

From the outset, CAS Trips recognized the potential of immersive educational experiences to serve as catalysts for long-term impact. However, it was understood that for this potential to be fully realized, students needed to be inspired and equipped to carry the lessons learned during their travels back to their home communities. This insight led to the creation of the CAS Project Challenge in 2019, with a clear vision: to extend the influence of educational trips far beyond the confines of the travel experience itself.

The CAS Project Challenge (CPC) equips students with the necessary tools, guidance, and motivation to tackle significant local issues, develop practical action plans, and implement projects that create sustainable change. Research has shown that service-learning positively impacts students by enhancing their self-esteem, improving problem-solving abilities, and increasing civic engagement.¹ Since its launch through 2023, the CPC has involved 6,494 students and 397 teachers from 45 countries, in conjunction with 27,398 hours of student service that have taken place during CAS Trips. This initiative represents a significant shift from traditional learning methods, as service-learning has been associated with increased empathy, a stronger commitment to social justice, and the development of

¹ Celio, C. I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 34(2), 164-181.



leadership skills.² Additionally, the program has successfully expanded its reach through an online competition, with over 150 projects submitted globally since 2018.

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the CAS Project Challenge, delving into its origins, impact, methodology, and future trajectory. Additionally, it highlights how the CPC aligns with and advances SDG targets by fostering global citizenship and encouraging effective partnerships for sustainable development (SDG target 4.7).

Background and Purpose of the CAS Project Challenge

The CAS Project Challenge (CPC) was initially conceived as an on-trip activity that would engage students in real-world problem-solving, directly tying into their educational experiences during CAS Trips. The original idea was to create a structured yet dynamic framework where students could take the insights and experiences from their trips and translate them into actionable projects upon returning to their home communities. This aligns with CAS Trips' overarching mission to foster global citizenship and encourage students to "Think Global, Act Local."

Recognizing the potential for a broader impact, CAS Trips made the CPC publicly accessible online in 2019, allowing students worldwide to participate. This expansion increased the program's reach and aligns it with SDG target 17.17, which emphasizes the importance of global partnerships in achieving sustainable development — "Encourage and promote effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships."

By opening the CPC to students beyond those who traveled with CAS Trips, the organization effectively created a platform for global youth to collaborate, innovate, and address local challenges, making a global impact.

Since its inception in 2018, the CAS Project Challenge has inspired thousands of students across multiple countries to make a positive difference in their communities. This case study aims to explain and visualize that impact, showcasing how the CPC has evolved from a simple on-trip activity into a powerful tool for global change.

² Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L. J., Ikeda, E. K., & Yee, J. A. (2000). How service learning affects students. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

The Impact of the CAS Project Challenge

Measurable Outcomes

The impact of the CAS Project Challenge is evident in the metrics it has achieved since its launch.

1. **Student Participation:** In 2023 alone, 2,000+ students from 31 countries participated in the on-trip CPC, representing a significant increase from previous years and exceeding initial participation goals. This level of engagement underscores the CPC model's universal adaptability during educational travel abroad and appeal to students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.
2. **Project Submissions:** Since the global online CPC began, 151 diverse projects have been submitted, highlighting the initiative's broad reach and the students' creativity in addressing local challenges. These projects range from environmental conservation efforts to social entrepreneurship initiatives, each aligned with specific SDGs.
3. **Global Reach:** The CPC has successfully expanded its reach to 31 countries, surpassing an initial goal of engaging students from 20 countries. This expansion demonstrates the program's ability to resonate with students worldwide, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic background.
4. **Partnerships Engaged:** A key aspect of the CPC's success is its ability to foster partnerships between schools, local organizations, and community groups. These partnerships enhance the quality of the projects ensuring their sustainability and long-term impact.

On-Trip Workshop: From Immersion to Action

The on-trip CAS Project Challenge (CPC) workshop is a defining feature of every CAS Trip, carefully placed toward the end of the itinerary. By this point in the journey, students have immersed themselves in the local culture, engaging with the community and gaining a deep understanding of its unique challenges. The workshop is a pivotal moment where these experiences coalesce into actionable ideas, empowering students to identify real-world needs and develop projects that make a difference.

The program is structured as a two-hour classroom-style workshop led by CAS Trips' Trip Leaders. These leaders guide students through the process of identifying local challenges,



developing action plans, and implementing projects that address these challenges. The workshop is designed to be highly interactive and experiential, encouraging students to think critically about the issues facing their communities and how they can contribute to solving them.

During the workshop, students are introduced to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a framework that guides their project development. However, the CPC workshop goes beyond a simple introduction; it is a dynamic, hands-on experience where students are encouraged to think critically about how global issues manifest in the local context they have been exploring.

As Sarah Dee Paschke, the Global Student Exchange Director at CAS Trips, aptly explains:

"The CPC workshops are seamlessly woven into our trip itineraries. Activities and excursions are designed to raise awareness daily and provide insights related to the UN SDGs. For example, visiting a local NGO might inspire students to work on a project related to poverty or education. These experiences provide a contextual backdrop, enriching the students' understanding and informing their project development."

This process of immersion and reflection is integral to the CPC workshop. By the time students reach this trip stage, they have observed and engaged with the local community, making them well-equipped to identify genuine needs. This focus on need identification is central to the CPC philosophy and is what distinguishes it from more abstract academic exercises.

The Workshop Process: Turning Ideas into Action

At the heart of the CAS Project Challenge (CPC) workshop lies the IPARD framework — Investigate, Prepare, Action, Reflect, Demonstrate — a core element of the International Baccalaureate's CAS curriculum. This structured approach empowers students to navigate each phase of project development with purpose and clarity, guiding them from the initial investigation of a local issue to the final demonstration of their impactful work.

The effectiveness of this framework is reflected in the experiences of both students and educators. A teacher from Gulliver Preparatory, who accompanied students on a trip to Vietnam in 2024, shared, "Our CAS project at the hospital was a sustainable project that was very rewarding for the students—they saw immediate results, and the Hospital Administration was delighted with the project. The Medical Chief made a special effort to take the students on a tour of the surgical unit and the outpatient clinic as a thank-you.



These group projects inspire ideas at home, and the students have come up with three new healthcare CAS projects to initiate in Miami, FL."

This testimony underscores the powerful impact of the CPC workshop, where students not only engage deeply with their projects during the trip but also leave inspired to continue making a difference in their communities. Central to this process are the carefully developed materials that support student learning, including two key worksheets that have been refined over the years. The IPARD and Action Planning sheet, in particular, serves as a critical tool, helping students to thoughtfully outline and execute their projects.

Identifying a Need: A Story of Transformation

One of the most powerful aspects of the CPC workshop is how it empowers students to identify and respond to needs in their own communities. This process of identification is not always straightforward, but it is at the heart of the CPC's impact.

Take, for example, the first online CPC winners, A Brighter Future Led by Nature, from Mombasa, Kenya. During their CAS Trip to Prague, they initially developed a project focused on women's empowerment, inspired by what they saw during their trip. However, when they returned home, they realized that the project needed to be adapted to better fit the realities of their local community. Instead of proceeding with their original idea to support souvenir and handicraft workers, they redeveloped their project into an innovative seaweed farming initiative, addressing a pressing economic and environmental need in their coastal community. This project, submitted to the online CPC in 2019, became a shining example of how students can translate their on-trip experiences into impactful, locally relevant actions.

This story illustrates a critical point: the CPC is not just about coming up with an idea; it's about identifying a genuine need and adapting plans to meet that need effectively. The Mombasa students' ability to pivot their projects based on their community's needs demonstrates the flexibility and responsiveness that the CPC seeks to cultivate in all participants.

Online CAS Project Challenge: Expanding Access and Impact

In response to the growing demand for accessible and impactful educational resources, in 2019, CAS Trips expanded the CAS Project Challenge (CPC) to include a robust online



component. This innovative platform opened the doors for students across the globe to participate in the CPC, regardless of whether they have attended a CAS Trip. The online CPC empowers students to take action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from anywhere in the world by offering inspiration and support via a global competition virtually.

Expanding the Reach and Empowering Global Action

The decision to create an online version of the CPC was driven by a desire to extend the impact of CAS Trips beyond the students who travel with us. Recognizing the transformative experiences that occur on our trips, we wanted to offer every student the chance to continue their mission of making a difference upon returning home—and even beyond. This online expansion enables more students to engage with the CPC, fostering a global community committed to sustainable development.

As Simon Armstrong, CAS Trips Founder, notes, "We saw the incredible potential in students who returned from our trips with a renewed sense of purpose and wanted to extend that opportunity to students everywhere. The online CPC allows us to support an international network of schools and students, giving them the tools they need to make a meaningful impact."

Metrics and Outcomes of the Online CPC

Since its launch, the online CPC has achieved remarkable success, attracting hundreds of students from diverse regions worldwide. This online component has broadened the reach of the CPC, enabling CAS Trips to engage a more extensive and varied audience. By breaking down geographical barriers, the online CPC inspires even more students to take proactive steps toward achieving the SDGs, amplifying their efforts' global impact.

The numbers speak for themselves: with 151 submissions from 45 countries, the online CPC has become a truly global initiative. The chance for students to make a tangible impact in their communities, whether after returning home from a trip or without traveling at all, has proven to be a powerful motivator. Moreover, service-learning is known to foster reciprocal relationships between students and communities, leading to mutual benefits and a deeper understanding of social issues.³

³ Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2010). The role of service-learning in higher education. In B. Holland & J. Meeropol (Eds.), *A More Perfect Vision: The Future of Campus Engagement*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.



Scholarship Opportunities and the Global Student Conference

To further incentivize participation and reward outstanding efforts, CAS Trips offers an annual scholarship to the winning project of the online CPC, allowing them to attend the prestigious Global Student Conference (GSC). This conference has been a highlight of the CPC, where winners showcase their projects on a global stage, network with like-minded peers, and gain insights from experts in sustainable development.

Although our last one took place in 2024, we will remember our GSC as a celebration of youth-driven change. They featured keynote speakers, panel discussions, and interactive workshops, all focused on the theme of sustainable development and the power of young people to drive meaningful change. For the students, attending the GSC was a life-changing opportunity that validates their hard work and connects them with a global network of passionate change-makers. Going forward, the CPC's annual winner will receive a scholarship for one of our Global Student Exchanges, which brings together participants from diverse backgrounds aiming to foster a love of cultural immersion through travel, and exemplifying the spirit of collaboration and partnership.

Showcasing Success: Inspiring a Global Audience

To further amplify the impact of the CPC and inspire others to participate, CAS Trips shares the top project videos on our YouTube channel. This platform provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their work to a global audience, showcasing the creativity and dedication of young people committed to sustainable development. By highlighting these projects, CAS Trips celebrates the achievements of students while encouraging others to join the CPC and contribute to the global pursuit of the SDGs.

Supporting Educators and Schools: Resources for Success

CAS Trips is committed to supporting the international school network by providing educators with the resources they need to lead their CAS program successfully. The online CPC includes a comprehensive set of materials for CAS coordinators, including detailed worksheets and guidelines that help students navigate the complexities of the CAS project. These resources are designed to be adaptable and user-friendly, ensuring that educators can easily integrate them into their curriculum and support their students effectively.

In addition, the CAS Trips' YouTube channel and online resources offer a wealth of examples and inspiration, making it easier for educators to guide their students toward successful project outcomes. With access to previous submissions from students in 20

countries, teachers can show their students the diversity of approaches to the SDGs and encourage them to think creatively about how they can contribute.

Lessons Learned and Future Growth

Over the years, CAS Trips has faced several challenges in scaling the CPC and ensuring its success across diverse educational contexts. These challenges have provided valuable lessons that have informed the program's ongoing development and refinement.

Challenges

1. **Visibility:** One of the initial challenges was ensuring that the CPC gained sufficient visibility among students and educators, particularly those outside of the CAS Trips network. To address this, CAS Trips invested in digital marketing, social media outreach, and partnerships with educational institutions to increase awareness of the CPC.
2. **Scalability:** As the CPC expanded globally, scaling the program while maintaining quality and consistency became a significant challenge. CAS Trips addressed this by developing an online platform that could support the growing number of participants and offering further resources to educators and Trip Leaders to ensure that they could effectively guide their students through the CPC process.
3. **Resource Accessibility:** Another challenge was ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, had access to the resources needed to participate in the CPC. CAS Trips responded by making all CPC resources available online at no cost and offering scholarships for winners to participate in the GSC and GSE.

Future Directions

Looking forward, CAS Trips aims to continue expanding the reach and impact of the CPC, with a focus on the following areas:

1. **Expanding Partnerships:** CAS Trips plans to deepen its partnerships with schools, educational institutions, and organizations worldwide. By collaborating with a wider network of stakeholders, CAS Trips aims to enhance the quality of the CPC and ensure its sustainability.

2. **Enhancing Resource Accessibility:** CAS Trips is committed to making the CPC accessible to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographic location. This includes expanding the availability of resources in multiple languages and offering additional scholarships to support student participation.
 3. **Increasing Global Engagement:** CAS Trips aims to increase the number of countries and schools participating in the CPC. By engaging students from even more diverse backgrounds, CAS Trips hopes to foster a truly global movement of youth-driven change.
 4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** To ensure the continued success and impact of the CPC, CAS Trips plans to implement a more robust monitoring and evaluation framework. This will include tracking the long-term outcomes of CPC projects, gathering feedback from participants and educators, and using this data to continually refine and improve the program.
 5. **Strengthening Alumni Network:** CAS Trips recognizes the importance of maintaining connections with past CPC participants. To this end, CAS Trips plans to develop an alumni network that will allow former participants to stay engaged with the CPC, share their experiences, and continue collaborating on projects that contribute to the SDGs.
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Case Studies and Success Stories: Youth-Driven Projects Making a Global Impact

"I am so inspired and impressed by the incredible work these students have done and the innovation they have shown when it comes to making a positive impact!" - Jessica Holsman, CAS Project Challenge Judge 2023

The CPC has produced numerous success stories, demonstrating the power of youth-driven action and the potential for local projects to make a global impact. Below are some examples of CPC projects that have made a significant difference in their communities:

1. Football4Impact: Uniting Communities Through Sport

The Football4Impact project has evolved into a major school-wide initiative, active for several years. The primary aim of this project is to provide young people with an opportunity to connect and learn about crucial topics like financial literacy, mental health, and community service, all through the lens of football. The objectives are twofold:

- To foster connections between diverse communities from different countries and backgrounds, united by their shared passion for football.
- To enhance leadership qualities while raising awareness about how sport and community service can address and alleviate these important social issues.

Football4Impact has brought together students and communities and has served as a powerful platform for raising awareness about these vital topics, making it a prime example of how sports can be leveraged for social good.

2. Shiv Nadar School: The Award-Winning "Hifazat" Project

The Hifazat project from Shiv Nadar School has achieved significant recognition since it secured second place in the CAS Project Challenge 2023, standing out among other submissions for the dedication and exceptional efforts of the students involved in the project.

Hifazat is a comprehensive community and school health program aimed at improving the health status of individuals with limited access to services, focusing particularly on women and children. The project's emphasis on both preventive and curative health measures has made a tangible difference in the community, earning it accolades and inspiring new students to continue the work, passing the baton to future generations.

3. CARES: Supporting Venezuelan Refugees in Costa Rica

CARES, a non-profit organization and winner of CPC 2023, has made remarkable strides in supporting Venezuelan refugees in Costa Rica. The project aligns with the 10th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) by providing essential goods and reducing inequality. The organization collaborates with entities like UNHCR and HIAS, distributing goods and raising funds through an innovative and cost-free approach: selling 3D-printed bracelets made from recycled plastic. Since its inception, CARES has collected 30 kg of plastic bottles, gained 120 Instagram followers in just two months, and set an ambitious goal of selling 1,000 bracelets by November 2024.

The impact of CARES is also demonstrated by its critical role in shaping future leaders. Ankit Patel, one of the students behind the project, reflected, "The journey we've been on the past 9-10 months has made me realize what I want to do with my life. The legacy I want to leave behind. There is little else that creates the same sense of fulfillment than helping someone else, someone in need."



These success stories highlight the diversity and creativity of CPC projects and demonstrate the profound impact that students can have when given the tools and support to take action.

Conclusion

The CAS Project Challenge by CAS Trips has become a global movement that empowers students to become proactive agents of change in their communities. By aligning with the SDGs, fostering partnerships, and providing students with the tools and guidance they need to take action, the CPC enhances educational outcomes and contributes to the broader goal of sustainable development.

As CAS Trips looks to the future, the CPC will continue to evolve and expand, aiming to inspire even more students to take action for the global good and create a lasting impact on communities worldwide.

For further details and links to the materials referenced in the document, please visit www.castrips.org/student-challenges/casproject/