

Report: President’s Challenge for Climate Solutions, 2022

“A sense of responsibility to others and a desire to contribute to the quest for solutions to grand challenges are defining attributes of AKU and its students, graduates, faculty and staff. I’m glad to see that the spirit of service lives in a new generation.”

Prince Hussain Aga Khan

Overview

The President’s Challenge for Climate Solutions was conceptualized to engage AKU students and trainees globally in thinking critically about the climate crisis. The Challenge in 2022 was officially launched on 27 May 2022 and closed on 2 December 2022.

Goals:

1. Educate, inspire, and encourage AKU students and trainees to serve as change agents for climate action;
2. Promote students’ and trainees’ critical engagement with climate issues;
3. Solicit and reward innovative and viable ideas from students and trainees through a design thinking process.

2022 Challenge Theme – Wasting Nothing

The theme of “Wasting Nothing” was selected for the inaugural iteration of The AKU President’s Challenge for Climate Solutions. The theme was broad enough to encourage participants to think outside the box, including on issues of waste and pollution, but also prompting mindful consumption of all resources they regularly use —e.g., water, electricity, food, and even time.

Partners:

As an AKU-wide initiative, this Challenge was sponsored by the Office of the President and executed with the support and expertise of the following departments across the University:

- Implementation lead: Office of Student Affairs and Experience
- Technical Partners:
 - o Critical Creative Innovation Thinking (CCIT)
 - o Office of Environment and Sustainability
 - o Office of Communications

In addition, 17 student ambassadors and over 25 volunteers were engaged throughout the process to ensure effective promotion and smooth execution of the different phases.

Phases for 2022 Challenge:

The Challenge process for the inaugural year was divided into the following phases to seek diverse and sustained student engagement. This [highlights video](#) captures the journey.

Opening Ceremony

On 24th May, the Challenge was formally opened. Three students (one from Pakistan, one from Kenya and one from Tanzania) gave brief presentations on their experience of climate change and action. AKU's President also shared his vision of the Challenge, while the Office of Student Affairs informed about this year's aims.

Expression of Interest

During the months of June and July, students were asked to fill in an Expression of Interest (EoI), including gauging their awareness on climate change, their area of interest, and initial ideas. This was filled on individual basis, resulting in 59 EoIs (90% from Pakistan, 10% from East Africa).

Ideation Sprint

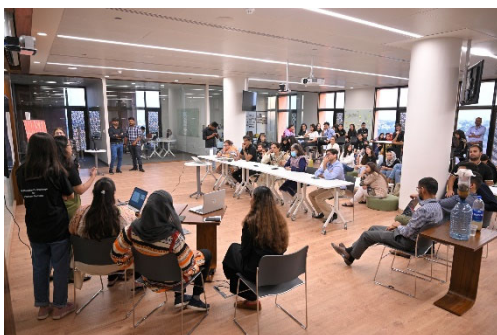
The Challenge's activities kicked off with a 2-day ideation sprint, conducted by CCIT and involving students from across East Africa and Pakistan. The students came together in small teams to brainstorm what relevant problems they wanted to address. The ideation sprint provided a space and learning opportunity for ideation using the human-centered design thinking process.



Hackathon

A 3-day Hackathon was conducted by CCIT from October 22 to 24, 2022. 100 participants joined the technology-supported and hybrid event to develop and refine their teams' ideas to address the Challenge theme. The Hackathon was supported by 12 mentors from within AKU and outside who provided valuable time and expertise to guide the students on all their questions relating to climate, action, and process. A panel of 4 external judges was engaged to assess and score the pitches developed by the students, including from sustainability start-up Davaam to Climate LaunchPad Pakistan.

At the final day of the Hackathon, 16 teams presented their ideas which ranged from plastic recycling and waste reduction to ridesharing and e-mobility options.



Schools Competition

24 secondary and higher secondary schools in Karachi responded to AKU's invitation and participated in a mini-competition where the best teams, shortlisted at the school level, presented their pitches in the AKU Auditorium on 15 November 2022. Some student groups had prepared prototypes and posters. The winning ideas included conserving water using tap aerators, recycling of cigarette butts, and making seed paper to address deforestation.



Closing Ceremony

On 2nd December, the inaugural year of the President's Challenge for Climate Solutions was celebrated with participation from across AKU and beyond in a hybrid event.

A highlight was Prince Hussain Aga Khan's inspiring video message, prompting the audience to ponder: *"The actions we take as individuals can seem small relative to the scale of the problem. But large-scale change typically becomes possible only when many individuals share common values that are rooted in common experiences. The first step is simple: to feel in your heart that you must contribute to the fight. Each of you has experienced that feeling. And you have begun to act upon it. I urge you: don't stop."*

AKU's President also expressed his gratitude and expressed the importance of acting on climate change.: *"A problem-oriented university can hardly overlook the problem of climate change. And it can hardly fail to engage its students in addressing it. I am grateful to all those who saw the Presidents' Challenge for the opportunity that it is, and accepted its invitation to innovate."*



Meanwhile, student speakers from the three winning teams of this year's Challenge enthralled the audience with their reflections and motivation:

ReLast: *"Together as youth, we are like the young, torrential river starting atop a mountain. Once we find the direction, with our energy, we can crush any obstacle, move any stone to make our way. To the older people in the audience, please keep flowing, because the river course will be incomplete without you".*

Climatica: *"Our team proposed creating an application with segments dedicated to raising awareness, carbon-emission tracking, and ideating small-scale solutions relevant to communities. Through the ideation sprint, we learnt brainstorming for impact, scalability, and the importance of starting such solutions from the ground up."*

ThinkGreen: *"The climate crisis is as real as the air we breathe. We, as the young generation, are powerful to mitigate the on-going impacts of climate change. During the challenge, my team participated with zest and brainstormed some ideas to reduce the waste we produce."*

It was clear that even though the Challenge for 2022 was ending, the students' climate action and enthusiasm was not, and that it was only AKU's first step in supporting their climate action journeys.

For marketing and promotions during the different phases of the Challenge, social media as well as email and messaging channels were utilized in addition to hosting two in-person open-houses for registrations.

Impact:

The visible enthusiasm of the participants and interest from the AKU-wide community demonstrated the impact of the Challenge. Furthermore, external engagement from schools and judges in the Hackathon allowed for the Challenge to go beyond AKU walls and to inspire ideation for climate solutions in high schools of Karachi.

The visibility on social media also garnered interest from the public (the campaign posts reached more than 360,000 people) and highlighted AKU's efforts to promote involvement of youth in developing innovative climate solutions.

This reaffirms AKU's commitment to engage and enable our students, as well as recognize that as an institution of higher learning we are looked upon to lead. This is fully in line with the AKDN Environment Commitment, stating that *"enabling future generations to engage in an informed and meaningful way with the challenges of environmental degradation and climate change is key for the success of AKDN's initiative in this area"*.