



YOUTH  
DEMOCRACY  
COHORT

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION HANDBOOK

Composed by the  
European Democracy  
Youth Network in cooperation  
with the European Partnership  
for Democracy on the occasion  
of the Summit for Democracy

**EDYN**







# YOUTH PARTICIPATION HANDBOOK

**EDYN**







## **FOREWORD**

I would like to congratulate my fellow co-leaders of the Youth Democracy Cohort for initiating this Youth Participation Handbook. The Handbook brings together best practices on inclusive youth participation in democratic processes, identified and implemented by young people around the world. Empowering young people to thrive and express their views and ideas is the best investment for a sustainable and peaceful world and this is the core objective of the first-ever Youth Action Plan in EU external action. Accountability, voting rights, freedom of expression, environment protection, peace-building or education are all key issues where young people's voice must be heard and youth initiatives promoted. The EU has notably set up Youth Sounding Boards to accompany its decision making-process in external action both at the global and country level. This handbook is not only a working tool to inspire new projects, it is above all a note of hope for democracy.

**Jutta Urpilainen**

Commissioner for International Partnerships  
European Commission

## Credits

The Youth Participation Handbook was composed by the European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN) and the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) on the occasion of the Summit for Democracy.

The Youth Democracy Cohort of the Summit for Democracy is devised as an inclusive platform to take meaningful action toward implementing Summit for Democracy commitments on youth political and civic engagement through resources, expertise, research, activities, and achievements.

The cohort is co-led by the European Commission, the Government of Ghana, the Government of Nepal, the Government of Costa Rica, the European Partnership for Democracy, the European Democracy Youth Network, Africtivistes and International IDEA. They have been joined by dozens of organizations throughout the world to work together for youth empowerment and inclusion.

### Youth Participation Handbook, Volume 1

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### Bratislava, 2023

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## INTRODUCTION

With half of the world's population under 30, the continued survival of democracy globally is overwhelmingly dependent on youth support.

Today, democracy faces a public confidence problem that disproportionately affects youth. After decades of not seeing democracy work for them and politics appearing out of their reach, many young people simply disengage from political and civic life. Democracies around the world increasingly recognize that in order to rejuvenate pluralistic democracy, young people need to be given the means to participate in all aspects of democratic politics.

In this context, the Youth Political and Civic Engagement Cohort – part of the Summit for Democracy's **Year of Action** – was launched to take action toward implementing the Summit's commitments vis-à-vis youth political and civic engagement. As a multi-stakeholder platform with over 50 member organizations from governments, IGOs, and civil society, the Youth Participation Cohort is committed to actively contributing to the Year of Action by broadening the evidence base on youth participation.

As part of the Youth Cohort's leadership group, the European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN) and the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) have spearheaded the creation of the Cohort's **Youth Participation Handbook**.

The Handbook contains 24 case studies from our Cohort members from 30 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe where youth movements, networks, governments and not-for-profit organizations working to empower youth share their best practices on how to effectively drive youth political and civic engagement across different countries, sectors, socio-political contexts, economic conditions, and local needs.

The Summit for Democracy Youth Participation Cohort Handbook serves as an inspiration for youth organizations and democracy organizations seeking to strengthen young people's voices in democratic processes; their understanding of democratic principles; diversity and inclusion within youth groups; and support young people, youth organizations, and youth movements in reimagining a more robust, inclusive, effective, transparent, accountable, and equitable form of democracy – one that works for young people.

Through the Handbook, the Summit for Democracy Youth Participation Cohort also offers an evidence base for policy solutions to democratic governments that want to empower youth political and civic representation and address barriers to meaningful youth political participation. The **enabling factors** identified by organizations from Costa Rica through Denmark all the way to Malaysia showcase how governments can create the right conditions for youth participation initiatives to thrive and succeed. Only with innovative policy solutions paralleling young people's creativity can democracies create the right enabling environment for young people to participate actively in public affairs.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

#01	Accountability Lab Zimbabwe <b>Arts 4 Change: Creative Activism for Social Justice and Accountability</b>	9
#02	BBC Media Action <b>"Our Story": Motivating Youth Action on Climate Change in Indonesia</b>	13
#03	Club de Madrid <b>Young Mediterranean Voices: Intercultural Dialogue for Youth Voices in Policymaking</b>	17
#04	Danish Youth Council (DUF) <b>Meaningful Youth Participation in Denmark's Development Cooperation and Beyond</b>	21
#05	European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN) <b>The European Democracy Youth Network: An Approach to Countering Polarisation</b>	25
#06	Equal Education <b>#LongWalkToSchool: Campaigning for Pupil Transport in Rural Communities</b>	29
#07	Fairtrade International <b>Fairtrade Youth Ambassadors: Driving Positive Change for the Agricultural Sector</b>	33
#08	Faraja Africa Foundation (FAF) <b>Creative Youth-Inclusive Policy Engagements &amp; Legislation Action in Uganda and East Africa (CYIPEL)</b>	37
#09	Helvetas <b>Promoting Youth Engagement in Local Governance Processes</b>	41
#10	The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) <b>Formal Civic Education: the SEED Methodology</b>	45
#11	International Republican Institute (IRI) <b>GenDem Think Tank: Leveraging Digital Technology to Empower Youth</b>	49
#12	Ministry of Culture and Youth of Costa Rica <b>The National Youth System of Costa Rica: Building an Evidence Base for Youth-inclusive Policy</b>	53
#13	National Civic Movement (MCN) <b>The 'Integrantes' Programme: Guatemalan Youth Strengthening Electoral Institutions</b>	57
#14	National Youth Council of Nepal <b>Mock Youth Parliament: Youth Leadership Development and Mobilisation</b>	61
#15	The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) <b>Youth+D: More Development, More Diversity, More Inclusive Democracy</b>	65
#16	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) <b>Delivering for Youth: How Governments Can Put Young People at the Centre of the Recovery</b>	69
#17	Plan International <b>Champions of Change: Girls and Boys as Changemakers for Gender Equality</b>	73
#18	Reconnecting Albanian Youth and Society (RAYS) <b>Co-designing with Young People: Financing Youth-led and Youth-driven Initiatives</b>	77
#19	Search for Common Ground <b>Youth Talk: Youth Voices for Change in Conflict-affected Countries</b>	81
#20	Sensitise Uganda <b>Enhancing Youth Civic Participation Through Mock Elections</b>	85
#21	The Oslo Center <b>The Youth Assemblies in Kenya: A Platform for Local Dialogue</b>	89
#22	Undi18 <b>Undi18: Lowering the Voting Age in Malaysia</b>	93
#23	Election-Watch.EU <b>Non-partisan Youth Engagement in the Electoral Processes: Increasing Youth Participation in Austria and Beyond</b>	97
#24	Youth Leadership Parliament <b>Youth Leadership Parliament: Make Ghana Great Again</b>	101





**#01**

 **accountabilitylab**

**magamba**★

**ZIMBABWE**

**ARTS 4 CHANGE:  
CREATIVE ACTIVISM  
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE  
AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Supported by:



## ABSTRACT

Arts 4 Change is a USAID-supported, youth-led, youth-focused programme that combines creative activism, popular culture and digital media. It aims to inspire a youth-led grassroots accountability movement and to support advocacy around critical governance issues. The programme hosts two key projects: Voice2Rep ZW has worked with 30 artists to create three music albums, while Film Fellowship ZW has worked with 20 artists to create 20 short films spotlighting accountability issues in Zimbabwe's 10 provinces with extensions such as the annual Satire Bootcamp and Rap Report. Participants learn how to use their art to influence thinking, behaviours and local policy in order to encourage bottom-up approaches. Through mentorship, training, network building and advocacy, the programme is developing a generation of socially conscious filmmakers, musicians and comedians with the skills and knowledge to tackle accountability issues through visual storytelling. By producing and distributing creative content in local languages, it encourages community conversations on inclusion and governance.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Flexibility of creative activism:** Arts are not as constrained as traditional civic and political activism, as they offer alternative distribution approaches. Mainstream media restrictions meant that some songs were not played on state-supported radio; the programme therefore relied on commercial and community radios to support distribution through online music platforms and social media.

- ▶ **Resource availability:** Arts remain largely underfunded, and artists in repressive environments hesitate to use their work for activism, as it can threaten their earnings. With 3 year USAID support, Arts4Change is able to carry the programme for five years, meaning the project could develop a continuous process of growth, enabling alumni to return to teach or lead future cohorts.

- ▶ **Collaboration with community-based organisations:** Launched during the COVID-19 lockdowns, the network of community-based organisations built through the programme ensured the participation of youth from urban and rural communities.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The Arts4Change programme adopts a positive approach, moving away from focusing on perpetrators by lifting people up and supporting solutions wherever possible. It also appeals to ‘unlikely networks’ when inviting applications. This opens it beyond the ‘usual suspects’, developing collaborations between creatives, musicians, filmmakers, technologists and others. This bottom-up, grassroots approach is central to this work, shifting the ways decisions are made through the Voice2Rep and Film fellowship projects and other smaller, but impactful initiatives.

**Voice2Rep** is a music competition committed to identifying, supporting and connecting socially conscious and engaged artists seeking the knowledge and skills to integrate social justice and accountability issues in their communities through their music. Each year, 10 up-and-coming Zimbabwean singers receive training and mentorship from established producers and musicians. They get the opportunity to record an album together and to compete at the Shoko Festival, where the overall winner receives a video recording deal and a financial investment into their music career as a prize. Voice2Rep artists have featured in local, continental and global platforms – including The Resistance Bureau, National Citizens Convention and the Youth in Gov Summit – and have been invited to perform and participate in panels on the role of music in combating corruption and advocating for youth representation.

**Film Fellowship** is aimed at young filmmakers in Zimbabwe with an interest in social justice and accountability stories. The 10 Film Fellows selected annually receive training and mentorship from established filmmakers, culminating in them producing individual films on integrity and accountability in their community. Their work is showcased in different communities through mobile and ghetto cinemas and at the programme’s annual film festival. The fellows also work alongside Accountability Lab Zimbabwe in documenting

the Integrity Icons Films that centre around ‘naming and faming’ exemplary community leaders to promote accountable leadership in Zimbabwe.

## KEY OUTCOMES

### Beyond the programme

Project alumni have continued their development. One film produced by a Fellow has been nominated for multiple film festivals inside and outside Zimbabwe. A musician from the first cohort was helped to access a Prince Claus award to support their music career. Some artists have started their own initiatives.

### Engaging policy makers

Since its inception, Voice2Rep has played a key role in the National Citizens Convention where selected present and past project musicians perform and elected officials respond to the issues raised. This way, artists can highlight restrictions created by the socio-economic environment and challenge policymakers to prioritise the creative sector through legislation. Elected officials often affirm the calls by youth for more to be done. Film Fellowship runs panel discussions at its annual festival, where film and public service stakeholders engage on the issues raised by the films. The filmmakers are present at the festival, while others join virtually.

### Networking and collaboration

The programme created a network of community-based organisations that are pivotal to its work by assisting in outreach during project recruitment and providing space and support for selected participants lacking the capacity to access virtual sessions. They also assisted in content distribution and facilitated spaces for engagement on the issues raised by the music. Furthermore, they expanded the reach by scheduling the films and music into existing programming.

### Outreach and movement building

As a national programme, the outreach took a hybridised approach, including mainstream radio and newspapers, community radio, pop-ups at events, roadshows and social media campaigns. Where songs were blocked by radio stations, or where artists were not interviewed because their message was considered ‘too strong’, the programme deployed alternative, independent platforms. Ahead of each year’s outreach, focus group discussions help agree

upon a theme consistent with youth interests and to provide direction on the best 'tone' that will work for different audiences, including women, persons with disabilities and the LGBTQIA+ community. This helped to make the messaging more accurate and appealing.

### **Resourcing innovation**

As the programme has grown, newer initiatives such as 'Rap Report' are allowing creatives to use their art to raise awareness on current affairs. This challenges the programme to find new ways to support these initiatives, including through collaboration and fundraising. This is an indication of the increasing broadness of the arts as a tool for expression.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTERS**

Arts4Change is an Accountability Lab Zimbabwe programme, implemented in partnership with Magamba Network. AL Zimbabwe

was established in 2020 and works with women, exemplary civil servants and youth to advance peaceful development, encourage citizen participation and inclusion and develop more accountable institutions.

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Magamba Network is Zimbabwe's leading creative organisation working at the cutting edge of arts, digital media, activism and innovation.

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#02



## INDONESIA

Supported by:



# “OUR STORY”: MOTIVATING YOUTH ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN INDONESIA

## ABSTRACT

Indonesia is the world's third-largest greenhouse gas producer, with 60-85% of its emissions stemming from deforestation. It has pledged to reduce its emissions by 29% on its own and, with international support, by 41% by 2030. Reaching this target depends on public engagement in green growth issues and effective governance of its forests and natural resources, as well as managing vested political and palm oil interests.

BBC Media Action used media to reach and inspire citizens, particularly urban youth, to take action on issues of deforestation and green growth. A 2020 survey undertaken among over 2000 urban youth by BBC Media Action showed that - while they are aware of the issues affecting forests and seek practical solutions - concepts such as 'deforestation' and 'forests' seem remote to them, and do not generate a sense of urgency.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

With funding from the Norwegian Development Cooperation Agency (NORAD), BBC Media Action co-produced a TV drama in 2019 entitled 'Our Story' (#CeritaKita). There was also a companion social media discussion series 'Chatter - Our Story' (Ngobrolin #CeritaKita) and a social media brand called Our Action (AksiKita). BBC Media Action started by increasing awareness and knowledge on key issues in order to build engagement and confidence. The next step was to show young people how to take action individually and encourage them to take part in civic and policy debate on environmental issues.

The project achieved a strong media reach, with 24.5 million people (equivalent to 17% of those aged 15 or older living in target areas of Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan) viewing the TV show and so-

cial media content. The project's brands reached 35 million people, with over 10 million who had not watched the outputs becoming aware of them. This suggested high media visibility and a capacity to generate debate.

The project was evaluated by Columbia University via a randomised control trial to clarify whether exposure to the project content impacted public attitudes and behaviour. This confirmed that such exposure did indeed increase understanding of the impact of deforestation on the country and prompted people to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. People who watched the drama were more knowledgeable and more likely to share environmental content with those in the unexposed control group. For example, 65% of people could name actions they had taken as a result of viewing project content, including searching for more information on managing household waste (mentioned by 54%),

minimising food waste (55%) and participating in environmental groups (10%).

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ Messages were communicated by framing the issue of climate change through the lens of pride in the country's natural beauty and resources through **short, engaging one-minute videos**.
- ▶ The issue of climate change has been made more tangible through **using rarely discussed but everyday problems as entry points**, such as dealing with unsorted waste and government policies on toll roads.

## KEY OUTCOMES

### Strong Reach and Impact

The project showed that it is possible to create engaging and financially sustainable media content around climate issues and green growth. However, to do so is challenging and requires early-stage investment and support. The TV drama #CeritaKita reached 13% of the targeted population. A social impact drama is a key vehicle for generating awareness and creating engagement on environmental issues. As well as achieving strong reach and engagement, the programming increased knowledge, encouraged individual action to protect the environment and provoked discussions on environmental issues. Leveraging drama formats, engaging brands and broadcast partnerships can help increase youth awareness and engagement in environmental issues.

Young people who had engaged with broader governance issues were not primed to engage on governance around green growth and climate change. This required a more gradual approach to helping them see the relevance of these issues and encouraging them to take individual actions as a gateway to interest in governance around these issues. The evaluation study showed young urban Indonesians preferred to fully understand and apply new knowledge before feeling comfortable talking to others about it. Research also indicated that the project benefits from focusing on

social drivers such as positive peer pressure. A route to engaging people is to break down climate issues into topics that are more relatable for young people, such as showing how they could contribute through recycling clothes, reducing plastic use or by holding leaders more to account.

### Role of media in addressing environment and climate issues

Traditional media platforms such as TV are the best route to achieve large-scale reach and to influence young people's reference networks in Indonesia. Some 87% of survey respondents felt that the Indonesian media provided poor coverage and little space for people to discuss environmental issues. Our research showed that exposure to #CeritaKita content created greater support (61%) for media coverage of climate and environmental issues than among our control group (52%). It also showed that 75% of those who were not taking action didn't feel they had enough information about the issue, while 44% were not sufficiently interested. Therefore programming presenting information and building awareness and engagement amongst audiences with little knowledge of environmental issues has huge potential.

### Make content specific, emotionally engaging and relevant

The topics of climate change, green growth and deforestation are vast and potentially hard for audiences to connect with. Programming engaged viewers by showing them solutions in a way that resonated with their lives, and that were clearly useful and sustainable. Emotional engagement in the drama was a key factor in how likely people were to report feeling informed about the environment and factors affecting it. Such engagement is driven by storylines that reflect young people's realities and characters that they can easily relate to.

### Regular social media monitoring is vital for adaptive programming

Research was undertaken with social media users to understand young people's platforms of choice. These changed over time; engagement via Facebook and Twitter was high in 2020, but dropped off in 2021. The project adjusted to rapid changes in young people's social media habits and started to focus almost entirely on Instagram (64,500 followers), and later also deployed YouTube Shorts to good effect (96,500 subscribers).

### **Influence risk perception and increase perceived relevance and immediacy of deforestation**

The literature on risk perception states that people are more likely to perceive risks threatening others - particularly distant others - and less likely to see these risks threatening themselves. On the potential for deforestation to harm Indonesian people, we found that #CeritaKita modestly increased viewers' likelihood of acknowledging the risks that climate change potentially poses to their fellow citizens - yet this difference was not statistically significant. Overall, whilst those exposed did understand the link between deforestation and floods, there is more work to be done to highlight how deforestation can have a direct impact on the lives of young Indonesians in order to drive them to action.

### **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international charity - we believe in using media and communication for good. In 2021, we reached more than 130 million people in some of the world's poorest and most fragile countries. Our projects and programmes save lives, protect livelihoods, counter misinformation, challenge prejudice and build democracy.





**#03**



**MENA REGION**

**YOUNG MEDITERRANEAN VOICES: INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR YOUTH VOICES IN POLICYMAKING**

Supported by:



## ABSTRACT

The Young Mediterranean Voices (YMV) programme has trained more than 9000 young leaders from the Southern Mediterranean region and Europe. It has provided them with skills such as critical thinking and cultural intelligence, facilitated constructive online engagement and has been part in more than 600 intercultural debates and dialogues. The knowledge, experience and wisdom of Club de Madrid Members (CdM) – former Presidents and Prime Ministers of democratic countries – helped deliver high-quality training, debate and workshops. In these, the young participants had the opportunity to listen to valuable advice on how to address the challenges of creating democracy that delivers, shape media narratives and influence public policy. Through these efforts, participants developed their leadership skills to help them transform dialogue into concrete actions that contribute to developing their respective communities.

YMV focused on using debating and dialogue skills to help young people's voice be better heard within the policy arena. It reaffirmed the core importance of developing debating skills, while at the same time responding to research findings that 'debate is not enough', by introducing aspects of the programmes that covered 'shaping policy and media narratives'.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **The strong backing for Young Mediterranean Voices** from the 42 Member States of the Euro-Mediterranean process. It was also embedded in regional and sub-regional cooperation frameworks, including the League of Arab States-EU cooperation, the Africa-EU partnership and the '5+5 Dialogue'.

- ▶ **The widening of its partnership base** to include multiple resourceful and influential partners, each of which added separate value to the YMV programme.
- ▶ YMV skills helped to **establish the voices of its alumni as clear and impactful in their communities**, thus enabling them to pursue their professional career with confidence.

- ▶ The project alumni took part in several CdM activities, such as its Annual Policy Dialogues and different Policy Labs during the course of the YMV project. This gave the youth leaders additional **opportunities to engage with key political stakeholders** on issues such as inclusive education, migration or digital technologies and democracy. It helped expand their networks and their ability to present and formulate their proposals and ideas.
- ▶ **The prominent role for CdM members** in activities involving countries from the north and south of the Euro-Mediterranean region. This allowed for sharing messaging on the importance of building interregional dialogue to face common challenges and build consensus on issues of interest to all.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Research throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region indicates that young people feel disenfranchised from political, economic, social and cultural opportunities for participation. At the same time, they are being portrayed in the media - because they are unemployed - as being a burden on society or worse still, a potential threat to national security and stability, vulnerable to extremist narratives.

The programme sought to address key challenges for young people in the region by training young people in debating and dialogue skills. This would enable them to become young influencers in their communities and countries. By embedding debating and dialogue training into formal and non-formal education, it would ensure the sustainability of young people's influencing capacity. In addition, providing young people with leadership and media training equipped them to better influence policy and shape media narrative on youth. The programme also provided opportunities for peer engagement in order to promote an intercultural dialogue and collaborative action between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The programme was co-funded by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations), the Government of Finland, the Center for Mediterranean

Integration and the British Council. It was coordinated by the Anna Lindh Foundation and developed in partnership with the Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI), Friends of Europe, Club de Madrid (CdM), MEDAC and Soliya.

## KEY OUTCOMES

### 20 National Policy Dialogue and Debate Forums

Through the National Debates and the Regional Leadership Seminars, CdM members had opportunities to take part in intergenerational dialogues, addressing key elements such as the promotion of human rights, gender equality and good governance for developing a new vision for democracy. This helped highlight the importance of investing in youth. In the process, they reached 70+ high level stakeholders and national decision makers, and supported youth representatives in presenting over 20 policy recommendations and forming National Advisory Groups.

### Youth voice and safe spaces

The project provided a safe space for debate for more than 9000 young people, one where they could exchange ideas, discover other cultures and learn from each other. This was thanks to the improved capacity of over 200 peer facilitators and over 30 master facilitators. These debates resulted in over 500 motions on issues that were important to young people.



### Increase in women's participation

In order to promote gender equality, the CdM offered equal opportunities for the women and men among its membership to take part in the YMV activities. It also offered the participants the opportunity to have an insight into the different styles of leadership, through

the experience of Club de Madrid members in their tenures. Here, Presidents Vaira Vike-Freiberga (President of Latvia 1999-2007) and Tarja Halonen (President of Finland 2000-2012) took part in the Palestine National Debate Forum and the III YVM Regional Leadership Seminar, respectively. They contributed, among other issues relevant to the SDGs, their insights on gender equality. With an overall female participation of 58%, YMV demonstrated that gender empowerment is crucial to promoting a youth agenda.

### Youth-led organisations' capacity increased

Over 200 youth-led clubs and organisations saw increases in their institutional capacity in management, procurement, reporting and



capacity building. Their digital skills were also enhanced through peer-to-peer capacity building and the redesign of the toolkits to meet the needs of, and specific factors affecting, youth (for example, difficulties with internet access in rural areas).

### ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

Club de Madrid is an organisation of democratic political leaders that works to strengthen democratic values, good governance and the wellbeing of citizens around the world. CdM's Programmatic Strategy places a strong emphasis on helping to build a Next Generation Democracy and promote social inclusion. CdM Members pay particular attention to the democratic engagement of youth, whose vision of political and social interactions is required to shape a better global future.

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**#04**

**DUF** THE DANISH  
YOUTH  
COUNCIL

**DENMARK**

**MEANINGFUL YOUTH  
PARTICIPATION IN  
DENMARK'S DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION AND BEYOND**

Supported by:



## ABSTRACT

Youth participation is a key priority in Denmark's development cooperation, recognising that development should be done **with, by** and **for** youth. Denmark 'walks the talk' through a number of tangible initiatives and a budget that allow for real and meaningful youth participation at all levels of its development engagement. This approach enables Denmark to enhance democratic confidence, culture, and participation among its youth as well as those in partner countries.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ Tailored capacity building and guidance from DUF advisors in support of the application, implementation and evaluation processes for grant processes.
- ▶ Simple requirements for project administration.
- ▶ Stable and flexible funding.
- ▶ Prioritisation of continuity and quality with overlapping mandate periods and a global youth advisor anchoring the programme in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## FUNDING POOL FOR YOUTH-LED DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

It is recognised around the world that youth participation is essential to ensuring the development of a democratic, sustainable and

peaceful future. Yet adequate funding for youth organisations and youth-led development remains a challenge.

In order to buck this trend, a funding pool mechanism has been made available to Danish youth organisations and their like-minded partners since the early 1990s. This ensures that development cooperation is undertaken with and by youth - rather than just for them. Youth govern the funding pool at all levels: DUF - The Danish Youth Council - manages the administration on behalf of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and grant applications are evaluated by young people in a grant committee appointed by the DUF board.

- The approach for ensuring accessibility for youth has been developed and refined over decades. It includes support through a number of types of grants, including outreach and start-up grants, which are designed to support natural progress, from identifying a partner organisation to full-scale development projects.
- The projects supported by the funding pool are designed and implemented by youth, and the approach is designed to make the funding easily accessible to young volunteers, regardless of their

background or qualifications. This way, it ensures that grant recipients represent a real diversity of young people in youth-led organisations; from scouts to youth with disabilities, students, youth clubs, political youth organisations and many more.

Numerous youth-led development initiatives addressing marginalisation and increasing democratic youth participation have resulted from the funding pool mechanism. In the Republic of Moldova, youth organisations have created and strengthened student councils in secondary schools to foster a democratic culture and participation among the students. In Rwanda, Baptist youth have supported marginalised young single mothers in order to re-integrate them in local churches and in society. Meanwhile, in Morocco, young politicians have been empowered to push for youth agendas in the formal political system.

All projects supported by the funding pool are designed to increase youth participation and influence. Impact assessment documents demonstrate how the supported partnerships contribute to citizenship and democracy in practice. They increase the commitment



and leadership among young volunteers, strengthen youth organisations both in Denmark and in partner countries and allow young people to become drivers of democratic change in their communities. They also strengthen the voices of young people, address discrimination against youth and their marginalisation, and are effective in reaching marginalised youth through a peer-to-peer approach. Furthermore, acknowledging the positive changes delivered by youth helps change societal attitudes towards young people and paves the way for structural changes in favour of youth inclusion and their participation in societies where traditionally they have been excluded from decision making.

### **MULTILATERAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION: THE DANISH YOUTH DELEGATES**

Eight Danish youth delegates give the country's young people a voice in multilateral decision-making processes and anchor global debates among Danish youth. The youth delegates represent Danish youth organisations and are appointed by DUF's board to ensure legitimacy. The youth delegates all have a two-year mandate, with four delegates nominated each year to ensure continuity. Human rights and the SDGs provide the overall framework, under which the delegates are divided into four thematic areas:

1. Democracy and Partnerships
2. Climate and Environment
3. Equality and SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights)
4. Vocational Education and Job Creation

The Danish youth delegate programme yields many benefits. The nomination by the board of the DUF, who represent 80 children and youth organisations nationwide, lends strong legitimacy to Danish delegations to UN meetings on youth issues.

The support of the government and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs allows for meaningful participation rather than 'youthwashing' at multilateral meetings.

The youth delegates are part of the official Danish delegations to a number of UN sessions, including the UN General Assembly, the High Level Political Forum and the Commission on the Status of Women. Through the years, the Danish Government has prioritised youth by allowing youth delegates to speak on behalf of Den-

mark and address the plenary sessions and advocate for further youth participation - including from the Global South - at various UN meetings. In addition, youth delegates are often invited to take an active role at sidebar events and meetings taking place on the margins of the UN meetings.

As one example, in autumn 2021, when the UN adopted a resolution on policies and programmes involving youth (A/RES/76/137), the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs entrusted its youth delegates for democracy and partnerships to negotiate on behalf of Denmark. They successfully advocated for strengthened language on youth participation. The process was a landmark for multilateral youth participation: while youth participation is increasingly recognised as important, UN meetings all too often have little or no youth participation, with tokenism remaining widespread.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

DUF – the Danish Youth Council is an umbrella organisation representing 80 Danish children and youth organisations. It promotes democratic youth participation in organisations and in society, both nationally and internationally. DUF is governed by a board of young representatives from member organisations, who are democratically elected at the general assembly.

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**#05**



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**ALBANIA**

# **THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY YOUTH NETWORK: AN APPROACH TO COUNTERING POLARISATION**

## ABSTRACT

EDYN is seeking to address the threat of polarisation by ensuring that the composition of its Country Chapters - its organisational structure at the country level - is inclusive across the ideological spectrum. EDYN's efforts to secure the representation of its geographic and political scope help both legitimise its mission and allow it to better reflect its founding values. EDYN's core message is that political partisanship, or belonging to a specific interest group, should be neither an obstacle nor a requirement to becoming a member and changemaker working for the benefit of society as a whole. This case study focuses on televised debates in the Albania Country Chapter, which created a safe space for young people to compete in front of a balanced jury with representatives from both main political parties. This offered young people an example of how debate and political contests can rely on arguments and merit rather than hate and division.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Polarisation exacerbates mutual group distrust beyond politics and in the ways that different social groups in democratic societies communicate, negotiate and resolve disputes, share power and resources and hold leaders accountable. Those seeking to exploit polarisation for political gain attempt to leverage otherwise nondescript policy differences between individuals and groups to turn citizens against one another. This threatens political institutions and the ability of civil society to sustain democratic norms and social stability in established and developing democracies alike.

Young people's broad and meaningful participation in political and civic life is essential to democratic resilience and adaptability to ex-

ternal and internal shocks, such as an increase in polarising language or behaviour from political and civic leaders.

EDYN provides a comprehensive approach for addressing the threat of polarisation by supporting young leaders in politics and civil society with early career development rooted in a tradition of political pluralism and access to resources and connections that encourage multi-party collaboration. EDYN creates a safe space for dialogue and consensus-building between politically and civically active youth from a range of ethnic, political and ideological backgrounds.

### **Incorporating traditional media: the case of televised debates in Albania**

EDYN incorporated traditional media into its no-hate communication strategy by organising televised debates and television

appearances for network members as spokespeople in Albania, Kosovo, Moldova and Ukraine. In addition to EDYN's international efforts aimed at capacity building, re-granting and networking activities, its advocacy activities are significant in their mission to counter-polarisation among young leaders. This case study focuses on televised EDYN National Debates organised in Albania in 2020.

During debates, teams of young people would challenge each other on various social, economic and political issues. Each team was tasked with learning in a way that would allow them to argue both in favour and against the topics at hand. The Debates were in three phases. First, individuals and debate groups featuring three people were selected by a jury; second, the groups debated each other, with the winners moving on to challenge further teams. The third phase saw the two finalist teams compete in a televised debate. The jury for the debates and the initial section phase consisted of representatives of the party in government, the opposition, EDYN and a person from the local National Democratic Institute office. This was to ensure impartiality and multi-partisanship.

The final EDYN National Debate was broadcast on Albanian national TV and was moderated by one of the country's most popular and respected presenters. The event drew significant attention from young Albanians and saw increased interest in participating in the National Debates and in becoming an EDYN member. In addition, it significantly improved EDYN's visibility and the legitimacy of its no-hate narrative. This reflected both the popularity of television shows in Albania and EDYN's association with a respected television show and presenter. This format was repeated in 2021.

The most relevant lessons learned include:

- Where possible, try to schedule most activities in-person; people connect differently when face-to-face.
- Make sure to allocate sufficient time and effort to selecting debate topics, interviewing participants and preparing them for the event. These elements can make or break such initiatives.
- Establish a format that can be replicated and sustained, but ensure that there is room for improvisation and flexibility where required.
- To ensure jury legitimacy, select members to reflect multi-partisanship and impartiality. This will increase both the credibility of, and competition for, the jury.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **A three-tier membership structure with representative leadership:** Each tier - members, ambassadors and the Leadership Council members - requires a commitment to a common set of values. These should not be rooted in a particular partisan perspective, with the local and international leadership accountable to and representative of the diverse membership base.
- ▶ **Inclusivity and representation standards:** The composition of EDYN Country Chapters should be inclusive across the ideological spectrum. This should be both between representatives of political parties and broader civil society, and among key identity groups. The Leadership Council should also be representative of EDYN's geographic scope.
- ▶ **Power lies with the Members:** EDYN ties the allocation of resources to single Country Chapters through a consensus-based, member-driven planning process.



This way, all participating identity groups hold joint decision-making power on programme activities and external communications.

- ▶ **A non-aligned, professional staff:** This non-partisan team should be responsible for administering EDYN's programmatic and administrative processes, driving engagement among its member support, managing relations with members and for stewarding resources for member-driven initiatives.
- ▶ **Critical strategic partnerships:** Affiliation with USAID, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) bolster the credibility of EDYN's institutional non-partisanship among key stakeholders. They also validate its approach to reducing polarisation and endorse the quality of its programming.
- ▶ **The right people in network leadership:** The network's leadership should reflect multi-partisanship and be inclusive of key identity groups. Individuals in leadership roles should have the public profiles necessary to establish EDYN's credibility with key stakeholders in member countries at critical stages of the network's development.
- ▶ **A mission appealing to a broad coalition:** What differentiates EDYN from other organisations focused on engaging youth in political processes is that it empowers an ideologically diverse cohort of young leaders in politics and civil society. By working together, members are uniquely placed to combat polarisation in their countries and societies.

- ▶ **Funding structure oriented toward sustainability:** Guaranteed multi-year financing for the organisation's start-up and administrative costs has allowed EDYN to build capacity to deliver quality programming at the required scale. A Matching Fund that EDYN can use to match partners' investments into joint initiatives helped EDYN position itself as capable of amplifying prospective partners' impact and made long-term partnership more attractive.
- ▶ **Collaboration incentives:** In order to receive funding for activities, EDYN Chapters need to build consensus at Chapter level for the proposed activities and provide cross-border sponsorship for cross-border projects.
- ▶ **Association Matters:** EDYN offers members a way to display their association with an internationally recognised network with a noble mission. Association with the network benefits members, as they can claim alignment with EDYN's values and benefit from its positive reputation.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

EDYN supports pro-democracy activists, politicians and journalists aged 18-32 across the political and ideological spectrum, in 23 countries of totalitarian heritage. They refrain from the policies of hate and divisiveness in order to unite their societies against authoritarian revisionism.

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**#06**

**E EQUAL  
EDUCATION**

**SOUTH AFRICA**

**#LONGWALKTOSCHOOL:  
CAMPAIGNING FOR PUPIL  
TRANSPORT IN RURAL  
COMMUNITIES**

## ABSTRACT

Pupil transport is vital to fully realising the right to basic education, as stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In 2014, members of Equal Education (EE) in Nquthu, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) raised long, dangerous walks to school as an obstacle to quality schooling. Pupils and educators identified that these contributed to lateness, absenteeism, tiredness and poor concentration. Furthermore, the lack of safe, reliable transport means that only around 5-10% of pupils attend school on rainy days. Pupils also face the threat of violence when walking to school, with girls at high risk for sexual violence and/or harassment. Since then, EE has been working to ensure that all qualifying pupils have access to transport by listening to their experiences, conducting research, mobilising, protesting and taking legal action supported by the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC). This has seen three schools in Nquthu receiving transport, with an additional 12 receiving buses and taxis in Nquthu in 2018 alone. Consistent campaigning also led to both the national Department of Transport (DoT) and provincial Department of Education (DoE) making provisions for proper transport. In 2017, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga committed to pressuring the National Treasury for a pupil transport grant. In 2022, EE's recommendations for improvement were presented to the KZN Provincial Legislature's Education Portfolio Committee. This forms part of a commitment to ensuring pupils in the province have access to safe and reliable transport guaranteeing access to quality and equal schooling experience.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Pupil transport is vital for realising the constitutional right to basic education. Although there are pupils throughout the country who must walk long distances to school, the situation is particularly severe in KwaZulu-Natal KZN, where some 500,000 pupils walk more than 30 minutes each way daily. Despite this, the KZN DoE planned

to transport only 53% of qualifying pupils, the lowest in the country. In 2014, KZN pupils, teachers and principals began campaigning on the issue.

EE's campaign led to investigations into this issue in KZN schools, litigation, marches and sending memorandum, submissions, and letters to the responsible government bodies. However, it was only af-

ter numerous efforts at correspondence and a march to the KZN DoE in Pietermaritzburg that the KZN DoE admitted that three schools in Nquthu qualified for transport, and only after months of efforts that the pupils received buses. EE also identified a further 12 schools in the area without access to pupil transport. As a result, EE released a statement demanding buses for these, an increase in the budget and a conditional grant to address the urgent pupil transport crisis in KZN schools.

Consistent advocacy by EE saw the National Pupil Transport Policy being published in 2015 by the National Department of Transport. In the EE analysis, submitted to the national Departments of Transport and of Basic Education, several concerns were highlighted, including the lack of clarity around planning, how different government departments would work together and budgeting. To ensure the government was addressing concerns over the lack of transport, a symbolic march from New Hanover to Pietermaritzburg in KZN (36.6km) was organised to demand proper implementation of the National Pupil Transport Policy. A memo was also handed over to the KZN MEC for Education demanding emergency relief for specific Nquthu schools, implementation of the National Pupil Transport Policy and more funds specifically for pupil transport (a conditional grant). The march took more than two days and was intended to symbolise the long walk to school that pupils in KZN and many others across South Africa endure.

Furthermore, in 2015 EE protested during the KZN 'State of the province' address to call attention to the planned decrease in the budget allocated to school transport and demand a conditional grant to implement a proper pupil transport policy. In the following years, EE made submissions to Parliament and to the Standing Committee on Appropriations on the rationale for this much-needed additional, ring-fenced funding. In response, Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga stated that the department was looking into ring-fencing pupil transport.

Although the DBE'S commitment to engage with the National Treasury on a pupil transport grant was encouraging, the sustained lack of response from the KZN DoE and KZN DoT to EE's demands, combined with the clear lack of cooperation between the two departments, led to a legal battle. In court, the KZN DoE promised to provide transport for the 12 Nquthu schools by 1 April 2018. The KZN DoE and KZN DoT also promised to report back to the court on several of our demands. In April 2018, buses and taxis arrived

at these 12 Nquthu schools. However, the KZN DoE and KZN DoT failed to address the province-wide need for transportation and to meet the court-ordered deadlines to provide a provincial transport policy and an implementation plan.

Following this tireless activism, KZN DoT and KZN DoE finally developed a policy to address the need for safe, reliable, government-subsidised pupil transport throughout the province. These victories affirmed the power of school communities in forcing systemic improvements in the South African public education system. The fight for pupil transport across the country continues.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Our Community Organising Model:** The campaign started with KZN members writing an open letter to the then-MEC for Education highlighting the plight of pupils. This provided urgency and ownership for the Nquthu school community to shape future advocacy. From 2014, EE's school transport advocacy has been beautifully documented, with pictures of pickets outside the KZN DoE and court explaining what is wanted and why it is important. All materials were translated into isiZulu language, making it accessible to community members, principals, parents and the Nquthu school community, and making them more likely to get involved. The key to the success was that it was led by those pupils who were directly affected. Schools also provided information on the impact on pupils and the dangers they faced. Teachers found it challenging to work with pupils who arrived up to two hours late, tired and unable to concentrate. The difference when transport is available is clear. Many teachers had faced similar challenges, so were happy to allow the campaign in schools after class.
- ▶ **Creating Community Campaigns**  
An important lesson was not to view this as an EE campaign, but rather as a community one to benefit future generations. EE seeks unity between parents, teachers and community members in realising common

goals. The demands were clear, making effective advocacy and messaging a key success factor. By avoiding an overly technical approach, it becomes easier to keep the community and the stakeholders updated, allowing them to relay information and maintain momentum.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

Equal Education (EE) is a youth-led mass democratic movement of pupils, post-school youth, parents, teachers and community members, using mobilisation and public action supported by careful research, to empower young activists and ensure equality in South African education. In 2023, our movement celebrated its 15th year

of activism. Over this time, we have placed education on the national agenda, mobilised young people directly affected by education challenges, and become a leading grassroots voice on education-related matters. EE members have marched, written letters, held vigils, met with government officials and public representatives, advocated in the media, made Parliamentary submissions, where necessary taken legal action with the assistance of the EELC, delivering major victories for pupils across South Africa.

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# Jecelyn Belegorio

Fairtrade Ambassador

“By becoming a volunteer Fairtrade Ambassador, I will be given the chance to advocate better livelihoods [and] to help my co-farmers, my parents and small farmers all over the scope, as their voice for the salient issues and challenges they are experiencing.”

**#07**



**FAIRTRADE**  
INTERNATIONAL

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**GLOBAL**

**FAIRTRADE YOUTH  
AMBASSADORS: DRIVING  
POSITIVE CHANGE FOR THE  
AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

## ABSTRACT

There are a number of known challenges facing youth in agriculture: these include a voice in decision-making processes and inclusion in organisational management, decent employment, and access to land, relevant knowledge and to financial services. Fairtrade works to correct these imbalances. Among other priorities, Fairtrade's Global Strategy 2025 seeks to empower youth in realising their role in farming and household decision-making and in informing advocacy and citizen engagement. Fairtrade strongly believes young people's inclusion in sustainable agrifood systems is a priority for achieving the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

In May 2022, Fairtrade launched an Ambassador Programme to reinforce its producer-led advocacy work. This capacity-building programme upskilled 15 young producers on EU and international policy; they contribute to Fairtrade's policy-influencing objectives by driving policy action on power imbalances in supply chains, inequality, human rights risks and climate change. Fairtrade Ambassadors participate in high-level debates as informed thought leaders and sustainable food supply chain experts. The programme was funded through Fairtrade's EU Framework Partnership Agreement Project "Unlocking the Power of Producers and Workers to Drive Inclusive Trade and Development through Fairtrade".

## ENABLING FACTORS

There is a widely held belief that fewer and fewer youth want to work in agriculture because they do not see a sustainable future in it. However, studies show that young people are involved at several stages of agriculture work, including production, capacity building, goods and services, and logistics. They also add value as service providers and entrepreneurs.

The programme identified the following enabling factors as crucial for achieving greater youth inclusion and long-term impact:

- ▶ **Altering power relations in structures and organisational settings that do not favour youth.** For youth-focused projects to thrive, institutional structures, regu-

lations and practices need to embrace youth inclusion and work toward change. The positive outcomes of such inclusion in the producer organisations need to be made known at community level. This will help to generate greater buy-in for inclusive governance, decent youth employment, skills development and business opportunities in agriculture for youth Leaders from youth groups, communities and institutions, working together strategically towards a shared vision of a fair future for youth in agriculture, are also key enablers.

- ▶ **Improving communication that recognises youth as credible innovative changemakers**, with the potential to increase food production, improve local food systems, reduce waste and create economies that pull communities out of poverty. They can also contribute to achieving Agenda 2030. Young people bring the physical strength and innovative ideas that will contribute to the sustainability of the farming industry.
- ▶ **Equipping young people to be leaders at the forefront of agricultural growth.** Trainings, exchanges, mentoring, and intergenerational learning are vital, as are access to investment capital and equipment. This is crucial to driving transformation and benefiting from new markets, enhanced exports, nature-based solutions, more efficient, sustainable production and innovation to strengthen local rural economies.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

To date, the global programme has worked with 15 Fairtrade Ambassadors (seven female, eight male), aged 19-37, selected from a pool of approximately 120 applicants. The Ambassadors are part of Fairtrade producer organisations located across the globe. Fairtrade strived to ensure geographic and gender balance, with representatives from Latin America and the Caribbean (from Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico and Nicaragua), Africa (Côte D'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda) and Asia (India, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka). There is also diversity in language and value chains. Nine speak English, five Spanish and one French; between them

they cover tea, coffee, cocoa, sugar, coconut, banana and horticulture value chains.

To empower the youth group, Fairtrade delivered a two-phase virtual training course. The first phase focused on advocacy, personal and leadership skills development. The second provided tools and information for participants to help them create compelling narratives and become confident, articulate and credible Fairtrade ambassadors.

The Fairtrade Youth Ambassadors programme has been running successfully in Kenya and the Philippines, in collaboration with local schools and universities supported by the Fairtrade Producer Networks in Africa and Asia. Young producers are undertaking awareness-raising activities and increasing their understanding of sustainable production and responsible consumption. They are also mobilising themselves to jointly advocate for policy action on ethical business practices at community and national levels.

As an example of successful engagement, Young Fairtrade Ambassadors and Young Fair Trade Advocates<sup>1</sup> drove the agenda of the Fair Trade Breakfast with Members of the European Parliament in October 2022. At the session, Deborah Oseh-Mensah, a Fairtrade cocoa producer from Ghana, called on the MEPs to consider the interests and ideas of smallholder farmers in their decision making: "If something is for me and my inputs are not requested, then it's not for me". Ambassadors also called for action to tackle the climate crisis, providing direct testimonies of their frontline fight against climate change. Food insecurity, a living income, the need for technology and digitalisation, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and many other challenges were raised during the event.

Youth Ambassadors also discussed Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence legislation with MEPs, providing recommendations to take into account the interests of smallholder farmers outside the EU and for ensuring living incomes. The experience highlighted how having youth producer representatives at the table with policy makers can lead to better-informed debate and successful outcomes.

To boost young people's interest in agriculture and their understanding of the important role of farmers in building a sustainable future for all, Ambassadors from sugar cane-producing organisations in the Philippines organised an awareness raising campaign for 400 elementary students and 19 teachers at Pandanon Elemen-

tary School, Negros Occidental, Philippines, under the slogan **'Support local, choose Fairtrade, save farmers'**. Following its success, the group in the Philippines grew from 15 to 80 Ambassadors, who are now actively engaging with local schools, faith-based organisations and communities through public mobilisation activities and social media campaigns.

In Kenya, the Fairtrade Ambassador programme is building partnerships with local youth, who make up Kenya's largest demographic group (70%), with considerable power and influence to drive change. Students from Strathmore University are taking part in the three phases of the programme (Fair Aware, Fair Active and Fair Champion). Following completion, they will have the skills to stand up for and advocate for those things that matter most to them and to all humanity.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

The programme is being implemented by Fairtrade International jointly with the three Fairtrade Producer Networks: Africa and the

Middle East; Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean. Fairtrade is a global system to change trade for the better by connecting farmers and workers from sourcing countries with consumers and businesses across the world. Fairtrade empowers farmers and workers to take decisions over their own futures to work toward the SDGs: from earning decent livelihoods to climate resilience, and from equality for women and opportunities for young people to protecting human rights. Fairtrade works with 1.9 million farmers and workers, 1930 producer organisations in over 300 product categories – from coffee, cocoa, banana to cotton, gold, flowers, and carbon credits – in 70 countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Young Fairtrade Ambassadors is a group representing Fairtrade producers, whereas Young Fair Trade Advocates are students at European universities who engage in policy debates and advocate for a sustainable and fair future.



**#08**



**UGANDA**

**CREATIVE YOUTH-INCLUSIVE  
POLICY ENGAGEMENTS  
& LEGISLATION ACTION IN  
UGANDA AND EAST AFRICA  
(CYIPEL)**

## ABSTRACT

The 2016 National Youth Policy of Uganda acknowledged the need for policies that empower young people to participate effectively in the national development agenda of the country. Despite this, the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these youth-focused policies has barely involved young people. Many decision makers still believe that political participation is solely for men, not youth and women; hence the legislative gap between the community and the Parliament. Uganda faces challenges in addressing social and ethnic inequalities, as well as the commercialisation of policy development processes within its political system. The COVID-19 situation has further restricted young people's engagement in Uganda's political and legislative processes. The Faraja Africa Foundation (FAF) is seeking to address the problem of a shrinking political landscape in Uganda, one which limits youth and community civic engagement.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The FAF CYIPEL project was created to reinforce the key role of young people in building sustainable policies and their implementation. Through the Civil Society Support Programme (CUSP), supported by the European Union and Germany, CYIPEL has built on the previous work of FAF in advocacy to push further for increased participation for young people in important decision-making processes. Within these shared spaces, change was clearly visible; young people built connections, they shared and gained knowledge, turned ideas into action and developed strategies to be deployed in the country's development and policy making process. Nine safe and inclusive youth spaces (platforms) – both physical and online – were created and hosted nationwide to amplify the voices of diverse youth to the authorities. Over 612 young people took part, including leaders of the National Youth Councils, the Stu-

dent Guild Councils, the National Students Council and the District Youth and Local Councils from the four regions of Uganda. In addition, a collective of a further 100 youth leaders – representing all seven East African Community partner states – took part in the activities resulting from the National Youth Parliament (the East African Youth Parliament) in Arusha, Tanzania. This amplification of young people's voices not only dominated discussions on the floor of the 11th National Parliament of Uganda, it also sparked serious debates on topical, youth-focused issues both on social media and on Faraja Television.

Together with national leaders in youth empowerment, CYIPEL has increased youth understanding, capacity and skills in creating, interpreting and advocating for policies. It also improved collaboration with authorities, key decision makers and youth workers for creating safe spaces (platforms). This helped allow young people

to debate critical issues around national development planning, its implementation, and budgeting processes for national transformation, prosperity and sustainable peace. The quality of youth engagement in key decision-making processes in Parliament improved, alongside the government's responsiveness on democratic and governance issues. In addition, the project led to more young people using digital platforms to drive awareness and advocacy around the country's policy and budget framework processes.

FAF also partnered with the 11th National Parliament of Uganda to ensure youth involvement in policy formulation for the national budgeting framework and other legislative processes. This led to effective, bottom-up implementation processes that helped deliver the National Development Plan III through inclusive youth parliamentary and digital engagements. National leaders also took action, with the Speaker of Uganda's 11th National Parliament calling an official sitting of Parliament in order to have all 500 members discuss the resolutions of the 5th National Youth Parliament one week after the event took place. At the same sitting, the Minister in charge of Uganda's Youth was directed to address the resolutions. As a result, the National Parliament, alongside other CSO partners, supported those young people involved in CYIPEL action in further debating – at a sub-regional level – in the East African Legislative Assembly. The resolutions raised in the Assembly have now been tabled at the Council of Ministers in the East African Community. In the next phase of engagement, FAF will follow up on the issues and further reinforce the youth spaces to allow them to deliver greater impact.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

CYIPEL is implemented by Faraja Africa Foundation (FAF), a regional youth organisation. FAF is committed to advancing social justice causes through policy advocacy, skill improvement, economic empowerment, digitalisation, culture and heritage with a keen interest in peace, human rights, climate change and the environment. FAF believes in placing young people at the forefront of their empowerment and development process.

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#09



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**NEPAL**

## **PROMOTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES**

## ABSTRACT

The Promotion of Youth Engagement in Local Governance Process (PROYEL) project began from the belief that youth can become leading agents for development. PROYEL encourages young people to engage in local governance processes. This way, they can positively influence local inclusive planning, transparent operations and resource allocations in basic service delivery under the new federal system of governance in Nepal. It supports youth programmes in Madhesh and Karnali provinces covering five municipalities in Karnali and three in Madhesh. PROYEL is led by Helvetas Nepal and works with two local implementing partners: Women Empowerment Action Forum (WEAF) in Karnali province and Sahayogi Samaj Nepal (SSN) in Madhesh province.

One of PROYEL's key initiatives is Youth Panels. These are the local-level youth entities that present their voices to local governments and their elected representatives. PROYEL has implemented eight such youth panels in the Karnali and Madhesh provinces. The project has adopted a participatory approach, bridging the gap between youth and government. It achieves this by empowering the appropriate holders with knowledge through capacity building, while also equipping local government representatives to engage in constructive dialogue. This is complemented by giving young people the opportunity to work and experience the responsibility of a real job within a municipality. Helvetas Nepal has made it a priority for Youth Panels to be inclusive, with a makeup inclusive of gender, caste and disabilities. This is to ensure that young people are represented and included in local governance in all their diversity.

Gayatri Pariyar, a Dalit<sup>1</sup> girl from Hariwon municipality's Youth Panel, had felt excluded from municipal activities, but she did not know how she could go about making local government accountable for her rights. She explains, *"After taking part in the two-day workshop in Lalbandi, I learned a lot of things about federalism, our rights and duties as well as ways to engage with local government."*

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Nepal is reaching a demographic dividend, considering the high number of young people in the country. However, they are often used more as muscle than as leaders and drivers of change. They often face a range of challenges, including unemployment, difficulties in accessing technology, a lack of skills development opportunities and quality education. Young people can also face various forms of discrimination, depending on their background. These issues are being exacerbated by the exclusion of young people from the local governance process.

At the same time, local governments lack the mechanisms and knowledge of effective youth engagement, leading to policies and programmes that do not address the needs of young people. PROYEL has helped bridge this gap between youth and local government by creating constructive dialogue forums, led by the Youth Panels.

## ENABLING FACTORS

Given this, PROYEL's main objective is to empower young Nepali citizens to exercise their rights more effectively through meaningful dialogue with local governments. It aims to achieve this by:

- ▶ Equipping young people with basic information on federalism, the constitution, human rights, the roles and responsibilities of local government and local planning and budgeting through different capacity building programmes.
- ▶ Developing the capabilities of local municipalities to engage with youth and mobilise young citizens in the local governance process.
- ▶ Encouraging young Nepali citizens to take an active role in local governance processes.
- ▶ Providing the opportunity for young people in Nepali to work in, and gain experience of, local governance procedures.

- ▶ Informing stakeholders (local, provincial and federal governments) about the importance of the meaningful participation of young people in governance and the development process.

These activities will increase the participation of youth in exercising their democratic rights and duties through dialogue and engagement with the local governments. By attending these programmes, 24-year-old Richa Singh Danuwar, a national Kabbadi Player and Youth Panel Coordinator of the Kshireshwornath Municipality of Dhannusha, learned about her municipality's youth engagement activities.

*"After attending a PROYEL programme, I came to know the processes for engaging with the local level government. I have now been working to generate greater awareness among other youth by mobilising members from the community to engage with their municipalities' activities,"* says Richa Singh Danuwar.

Another way that Youth Panels have successfully changed local governance is by advocating, budgeting and lobbying for youth-focused programmes. Ankit Chaudhary, Coordinator of the Youth Panel of Barathawa Municipality explains that *"As per our suggestion, the mayor and ward chairs of our municipality agreed to incorporate some youth entrepreneurs and skill development programmes in the annual budget"*.

Ramesh Budhathoki, Mayor of Hariwon Municipality of the Sarlahi District of Madhesh Province, says: *"As a mayor, I have been focusing on programmes to retain the youth in the municipality. For this, I need to engage youth in our municipality's processes like budgeting, programme and plan making and implementation. As young people are migrating on a large scale, we have been facing a dearth of human resources required for the development"*. With increased support from local governments, it has also become easier for youth to engage and advocate for their needs, as local governments have also recognised their power to enact change.

The programme will benefit some 16,000 young Nepali citizens by engaging Youth Panels as well as schools and municipalities.

Through the implementation PROYEL activities, young people in the Madhesh and Karnali Provinces have become aware of, and been

educated on, local governance issues. This increased knowledge and awareness has seen them undertake constructive engagement with local government. The project is an example of creating successful youth engagement activities as part of local governance, and it offers a potential model to be replicated in other provinces and municipalities. As young people get an opportunity to work and gain practical experience in local government affairs, many have expressed an interest in continuing their work in local politics. Local government has also gained the capacity to engage with and mobilise young people, creating an enabling environment for youth engagement in Nepal.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTERS

Helvetas Nepal has been operating under an agreement with the Government of Nepal since 1956. It aims to create an environment where people have new choices and are equipped with new skills and abilities that can improve their livelihoods. Helvetas Nepal's programme document identifies young people as one of its fo-

cus areas and seeks to ensure their participation in social, economic and political spheres.

Sahayogi Samaj Nepal (SSN) is a Madhesh province-based youth NGO that has been active since 2010. It draws 81% of its board members and 73% of its general members from young people. SSN has prioritised women, children, adolescents, youths and migrant youths as their target groups.

Women Empowerment Action Forum (WEAF) is a Karnali province-based NGO. It has 100% female board and general membership. It has implemented more than twenty projects over the last two decades in the sectors of female empowerment, reproductive health and safer motherhood, good governance and accountability, youth mobilisation and livelihood promotion.

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**Cover photo:** Youth Panel members undergoing training on federalism, constitutional provisions and local governance

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<sup>1</sup> A reclaimed term for members of socio-economically disadvantaged castes in South Asia.



**#10**



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems

**ARMENIA, BANGLADESH,  
GEORGIA AND UKRAINE**

**FORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION:  
THE SEED METHODOLOGY**

## ABSTRACT

In 2010, IFES developed a global, university-level civic education approach entitled 'Strengthening Engagement through Education for Democracy' (SEED). This was designed to better engage young people in learning about their rights and responsibilities and applying them in their communities and democratic processes. The SEED curriculum, materials and methodology are country-specific, and are designed to foster students' democratic values and attitudes, while equipping them with the knowledge and skills essential to engage effectively in digital age democracies as well as closing democratic spaces. The SEED core methodology teaches topics that include government, democracy, media and elections. There are interactive teaching methods to spark critical thinking, active listening, public speaking and problem solving, as well as action projects that empower students to apply in practice what they have learned. This involves designing and implementing projects that solve an issue within their communities. IFES recognises that the traditional lecture-style format in schools does not work; this is why IFES trains and supports teachers in developing methods that ensure students learn from each other and engage in thoughtful, democratic debate. The SEED methodology and university-level civic education course have been adapted for use in Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Bangladesh. Currently, over 60 universities offer the SEED-informed course and over 15,000 students have participated in the course.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

SEED is tailored to specific cultural contexts, through a careful analysis of the target audiences, and is designed to effectively raise awareness on a range of topics. These include democratic rights and responsibilities, election processes and procedures, good governance, civic engagement, rule of law and anti-corruption and human rights and inclusion of marginalised groups. Following the

initial assessment, partners provide support in adapting and developing curriculum content and materials. Often, IFES signs memoranda of understanding with the MoE and universities, cementing long-term partnerships to continue providing the course to students after the initial pilot. The SEED course is sustained in each country, in large part as a result of the network of young leaders and adult champions it helps foster. In Georgia, IFES helped establish the Civic Education Lecture Association (CELA), a network of civic educa-

tors who represent the majority of accredited universities across the country and who help maintain Georgia's SEED curriculum.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Clear understanding of the needs:** As a first step in designing a civic education course for universities, IFES undertakes a civic education assessment to determine the gaps and entry points, the civic environment and potential institutional and civil society partners. During its pilot phase in Georgia, the civic education assessment found that - for the most part - civic education curricula did not exist at university level in Tbilisi. From there, IFES partnered with six universities to pilot the course.
- ▶ **Institutional partnerships:** For formal programmes conducted in educational settings, partners - including Ministry of Education (MoE) officials, university administrators, professors, local education specialists and community members - are critical in ensuring the success of the SEED-informed course.
- ▶ **Hands on and 'learning by doing' approaches:** The ultimate exercise of the course is the student action projects. These connect the students with their communities, designing and implementing activities in coordination with community members and elected officials.

## KEY OUTCOMES

### Student projects

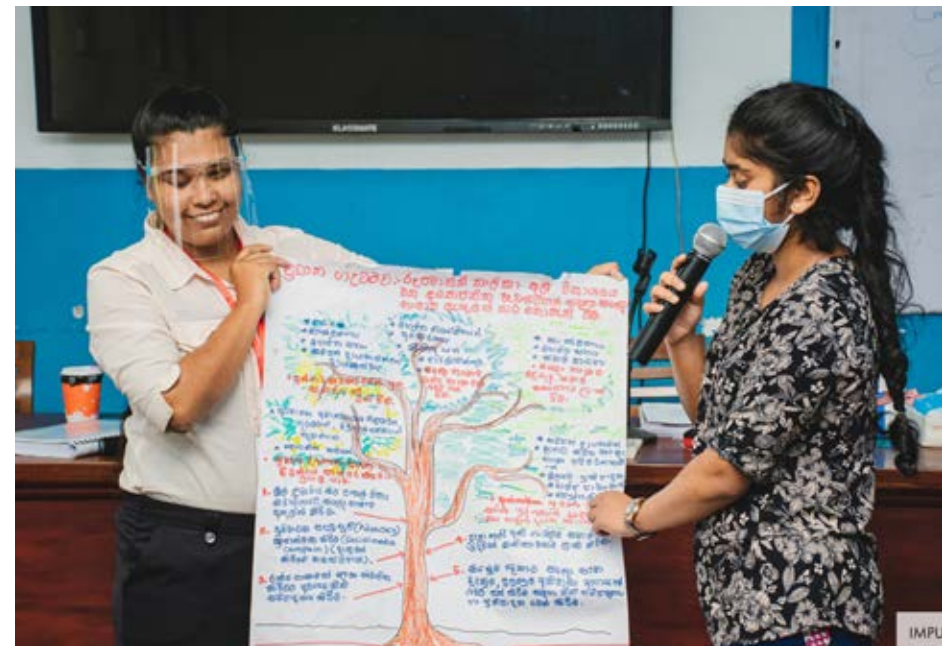
Building on the course material, but ultimately reflecting the creativity and interests of the students, SEED has allowed students to develop concrete projects that improve the lives of their communities. These include rebuilding a community playground in a remote village of Armenia and organising beach clean-ups in Odesa, Ukraine. More examples of student action projects from Ukraine can be found on the DemMap website, a repository for high-impact projects conducted by students in universities around the country.

### Community Outreach

The projects, although short term, carry the prospect of longer-term engagement for students to be active citizens for increasing the awareness of the role young people can play in their communities. Indeed, student action projects draw on community support, engaging community members of all ages to help with implementing projects. In one example, SEED students planted over 1000 trees in Lviv, Ukraine with the help of students from other universities, high schools and young people from nearby communities.

### Sustainable networks

The SEED course is sustained in each country due in large part to the network of young leaders and adult champions it helps to foster. After running the course in Georgia for over a decade, alumni have gone on to serve as poll workers and election observers. Some have established two CSOs that promote human rights and share electoral information, namely the 'Youth for the future XXI' and the 'Civic Activities Development Society'. Others ran for and won a seat in local government. In Ukraine, some course alumni founded the Youth Democratic Association, a CSO that promotes democratic principles and serves as a mentor and network for course participants and alumni. In 2022, Ukrainian professors established the Civic Educators Association to support civic educators across the



country. Last, in Bangladesh, students took teaching outside of the classroom through webinars on COVID-19, discussing the pandemic's impact on disability rights, activism and social cohesion. These successes reflect the enduring links and sustained civic engagement that SEED fosters in young leaders around the world.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) advances democracy for a better future. We collaborate with civil society, public institutions and the private sector to build resilient democracies that deliver for everyone. As the global leader in the promotion

and protection of democracy, our technical assistance and applied research develops trusted electoral bodies capable of conducting credible elections; effective and accountable governing institutions; civic and political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate. It also helps develop innovative ways for technology and data to assist in serving elections and democracy. Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries, from developing to mature democracies.

### **Contacts:**

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# GENDEM THINKTANK



generationdemocracy  
CREATING TOMORROW'S DEMOCRACY TODAY

# #11

**IRI** INTERNATIONAL  
REPUBLICAN  
INSTITUTE  
Advancing Democracy Worldwide

**NIGERIA, ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE**

**GENDEM THINK TANK:  
LEVERAGING DIGITAL  
TECHNOLOGY TO  
EMPOWER YOUTH**

Supported by:

**NED** NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR  
DEMOCRACY  
SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

## ABSTRACT

Three young Africans – Mantate Mlotshwa from Zimbabwe, Winnie Akidi Adile from Uganda and Oluwafemi John from Nigeria – collaborated to create the GenDem Think Tank, a Generation Democracy project. The GenDem Think Tank created spaces for young people in Nigeria and Zimbabwe to engage in the 2023 elections in the two countries, unpacking issues of the impact of digital activism and electoral violence on youth participation. These virtual conversations attracted more than 300 listeners. They featured nine speakers, notably including a Zambian youth leader who shared lessons learned from the landmark 2021 Zambian elections, which saw opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema become President. These dialogues were supported by a peace campaign, in which young people from throughout Africa spoke about their vision for peaceful elections and the role of youth in influencing peace and tolerance.

Another arm of the project was a virtual digital advocacy training, where 64 young people were selected - from 275 applicants - for a two-day skill sharing course with facilitators from Zambia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. This training was delivered via a format accessible to a majority of youth facing internet connectivity challenges and was hailed as transformative. Several participants have gone on to use what they learned to lead advocacy campaigns, crediting the project as where they learned to appreciate the power of social media for positive change. The project delivered three core outcomes:

1. Facilitated a peer-learning opportunity on strategies for optimising youth voter turnout in 2023 elections in Zambia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe.
2. Shared information on the value of peaceful electoral processes in Zimbabwe and Nigeria.
3. Increased the knowledge and capacity of youth in using digital media tools in their advocacy.
4. Created networking and collaboration space for youth advocates.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Shared challenges in African countries:** Young people in Africa often experience similar challenges, particularly around elections. This allowed the project to create space for knowledge and experience sharing, by expanding young people's access to fellow youth in other countries and regions.
- ▶ **Charged electoral environment:** The history of violent elections on the continent made the decision to focus the project on Nigeria and Zimbabwe timely, because both countries are holding elections in 2023. Both have a history of violence where young people are often victims and perpetrators.
- ▶ **WhatsApp as a training platform:** The continent is currently facing electricity shortages and the high cost of data makes platforms such as Zoom or Teams costly and inflexible. In their feedback, participants applauded the effective use of WhatsApp to run two full days of training, citing it as something other courses could adopt.

## DESCRIPTION

The growing use of smartphones and the uptake of mobile internet in Africa is changing how citizens access and engage with information about elections. The digital advocacy training was premised on the need to increase the capacity of youth to leverage digital technology as an alternative means for policy advocacy and awareness raising on civic and political issues. The WhatsApp training equipped young people with knowledge and tools to leverage digital technology for advocacy.

The five-module training included an introduction to advocacy to ensure all participants understood the concept and could contextualise it in their work before learning how to integrate digital tools. This module drew inspiration from the African Union African Governance Architecture youth participation guides. The second module was on the placing of digital media tools in local, national and

continental advocacy. The third explored effective communication and engagement strategies, while the fourth was a case study of effective digital advocacy campaigns in the lead-up to Zambia's 2021 elections. The final module focused on the effective use of both traditional and digital tools and platforms to expand the reach of advocacy. This was a peer-learning model featuring trainers with a proven track record of leveraging digital tools for social and policy campaigns.

Following the training, three outstanding project participants were selected and featured in an Instagram Live on the Generation Democracy page, where they reflected on the training and how they see it fitting into their work. Participants asked that the WhatsApp group created for this training not be dissolved so that they could continue engaging, sharing opportunities and experiences.

*What stood out for me was how you guys used WhatsApp, because with load-shedding and data cost, it's so much more accessible. It was the first time I attended a WhatsApp-based training and I loved the format.*

**Laone Van Vuuren, Botswana**

*I was very touched by what the youth were able to do in Zambia when they organised and advocated for youth participation and how everything turned out so beautifully to the extent of changing an entire government. The most impactful thing for me was a challenge to myself to say what can I do in my spaces of influence to galvanise the youth vote.*

**Brian Sibanda, Zimbabwe**



In addition to the WhatsApp training, the project undertook a series of Twitter-based dialogues seeking to convene young people in Zimbabwe and Nigeria as well as in Africa more broadly. The aim was to discuss some of the fundamental issues impacting youth voter turnout, targeting Zimbabwe and Nigeria's 2023 elections in particular. The first of these focused on the intersection of digital media and youth voter turnout in Zimbabwe; the second on the impact of election violence on youth voter turnout in Nigeria; the third on lessons between the two countries, drawing on the experiences of young people in Zambia. To supplement the dialogues, the team created eight posters and other media, which were shared on social media platforms. Peace message messages were amplified to over 1500 young people.

*We need to raise our voice beyond the rhetoric; the conversation on increasing youth political participation is long overdue. We need to shift to having conversations on future dynamics.*

**Mwila Bwanga, Zambia**

*The conversations that we are having matter because they shape who we are as Africans. In shaping who we are, they ultimately change the world's discourse. I would love us to keep on having these conversations, but beyond having the conversations, we should implement the local documents we have. The constitutions we have in our countries, the African governance architecture and in particular, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.*

**Thando Gwinji, Zimbabwe**

Creating platforms for engagement provided young people with the space to understand the similarities and differences in their ex-

periences and encouraged a sense of solidarity in the fight for progressive electoral processes and resilient democracies. Across the continent, youth have been both victims and perpetrators of election violence. The peace campaign was built around the principle of shared responsibility in ensuring peace. By mobilising youth leaders from different countries to share a message of peace, and by encouraging youth to be champions of political tolerance, the campaign reminded young people that 'we are one', and that the culture of peace requires young people across countries to hold fellow youth accountable for their role in the election violence. It was a call for young people to recognise that election violence was deterring them from voting, and as a demographic majority, the absence of their vote greatly impacts the outcome of elections.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

The GenDem Think Tank is a Generation Democracy-supported project implemented by three African youth leaders: Mantate Mlotshwa (Zimbabwe); Winnie Adile (Uganda) and Oluwafemi John (Nigeria). Generation Democracy is the flagship youth network of the International Republican Institute (IRI). It aims to increase the capacity of youth around the globe, to mobilise young people effectively and champion democratic reform. It seeks to tackle barriers to meaningful youth participation in building more resilient, responsive and inclusive democracies. The GenDem Think Tank was a regional subaward project under the network's Global Member Advisory Board grants.

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**#12**



**COSTA RICA**

**THE NATIONAL YOUTH  
SYSTEM OF COSTA RICA:  
BUILDING AN EVIDENCE BASE  
FOR YOUTH-INCLUSIVE POLICY**

## ABSTRACT

Costa Rica has long been in the vanguard of youth inclusion in democratic processes. Its Vice-Ministry of Youth has set out a comprehensive approach for encouraging and improving youth engagement.

The National Youth System of Costa Rica has achieved policy success, as demonstrated by its willingness to repeat initiatives such as the National Youth Survey and through the approval of its 'Public Policy for Young People 2020-2024'. The National Youth System has undertaken three successive editions of the National Youth Survey, in 2007, 2013 and 2018. This demonstrates a commitment to engaging with young people and provides statistics on education, work, family life, health and the perceptions of rights among young people. The National Youth Survey is helping broaden the evidence base on youth political participation in order to inform policy. It is these consultative processes, which bring real insights from Costa Rica's young people, that has allowed the Vice-Ministry to develop a National Youth Policy specifically targeting the identified needs of youth.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Costa Rica has had a body responsible for youth policy, in the form of the National Youth Movement Office, since 1966. Through the promulgation of the General Law for Young People in 2002, this movement evolved into the National Youth System. This then led to the creation of the Vice Ministry of Youth and the National Council of Young Persons, the preeminent entities in youth issues, which have supported civil society organisations made up of young people from all over the country. Having in place a National Youth System that supports young people through a legal framework – such as the establishment of public youth policies –

has seen the public investment required for creating and applying the Public Policies of the Young Person and the National Youth Surveys. The National Youth Survey is an instrument for gathering statistical data on education, work, family life, health and the perceptions of rights among young people. The survey has been championed by the National Council of Young Persons. The information – which is collected through consultations with a large number of young people from all over the Costa Rican territory and takes into account ethnic representation and diversity – is analysed and used to inform policy. This, along with other consultations with young people, allows the critical issues affecting young people to be properly prioritised.

This is important, because the needs of the young people change rapidly. Therefore, having access to this information allows public policies to be updated accordingly in order to be able to meet these needs. This is why Costa Rica has carried out three editions of the National Youth Survey in 2007, 2013 and 2018, each of which was followed by the formulation of a Public Policy for Young Persons. The first covered the period 2007-2009 and the second 2014-2019. The latest iteration came into force in 2020 and will run until 2024.

The National Youth Survey explores the various inequalities experienced by young people created by differences in background and social inequalities. These include access to healthcare and mental health support, quality education and access to information and communication technologies (ICT). It also looks at economic inequalities and inequities in political participation arising from the various social and environmental settings.

The Public Policy for Young Persons is a comprehensive approach that aims to fully incorporate the perspectives of young people into national developments. It encourages them to become more aware of the issues that affect young people, as well as to take an active role in creating the solutions to tackle these challenges. Before the creation of the first Public Policy for Young Persons, there was no action plan to address the needs of young people at an institutional level. However, through its establishment, there is now a public policy capable of guiding institutions how to best serve its youth population.

Other international and regional agreements have also helped strengthen the commitment of the Costa Rican government to its National Youth System. These include compacts such as the Ibero-American Convention on Youth Rights (ratified by Costa Rica in 2007), the 2030 Agenda, with its 17 SDGs and its basic principle of

“Leave no one behind”, the Ibero-American Youth Pact (approved by the XXV Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2016) and the Regional Action Plan for Rural Youth of the SICA countries (approved in 2017).

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Implementing broad consultative processes** – such as the National Youth Survey – to gain input from young people. This made it possible to prioritise the issues affecting young people and identify the institutions responsible for finding solutions.
- ▶ **Constructing a legal framework** – such as the Public Policy for the Young Persons – that helps deliver public policies that directly benefit the target population in all its diversity and in all the territories of the country.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

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Vice Ministry of Youth.

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This initiative is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Youth.







**#13**



**GUATEMALA**

**THE 'INTEGRANTES'  
PROGRAMME: GUATEMALAN  
YOUTH STRENGTHENING  
ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS**

## ABSTRACT

The youth population of Guatemala (ages 18-35) is growing, which is directly impacting the national conversation around the country's political agenda. Improving citizen engagement and having free and transparent elections are core issues for this age group. Through its 'Integrantes' (Members) programme, the '**Movimiento Cívico Nacional**' (National Civic Movement - MCN in Spanish), fosters active civic engagement by young people in Guatemalan politics. This allows them to participate, discuss and question the country's political landscape via safe, dynamic in-person and digital platforms. The programme combats increasing youth disengagement from national politics by providing education on a range of issues. These include the need for electoral reform, the importance of transparent electoral laws and the benefits of an open dialogue in strengthening electoral institutions to reinforce democracy as a whole in Guatemala.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ Democracy and the rule of law can be perceived as abstract concepts. To make them more tangible and accessible to young people, MCN worked with real-life examples to show how these directly impact daily lives.
- ▶ The programme created designated safe spaces for public discussions, such as round tables with public officials where young adults could express their concerns, listen to institutional perspectives and how their concerns are being addressed, and provide a platform to propose their own solutions.

- ▶ Co-creating workshops enabled us to better understand the needs, opinions and areas of priority for young people.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

In the coming 50 years, people aged 20-34 will make up more than 50% of the Guatemalan population. This makes it imperative to empower and build a prosperous and democratic society in which this growing population can thrive. According to the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), around 38% of Guatemalan citizens are dissatisfied with democracy, and only one-third trust the electoral process. Support for democracy in the region has been

stagnant for decades. In Guatemala specifically, around 55% of the population would even go as far as preferring a dictatorial system, if it guaranteed a basic income and/or public services at the expense of not having elections. Despite the high levels of distrust and apathy towards democracy, the growing youth population represents an opportunity to reclaim community engagement on the country's political agenda. This can be through civic movements, strengthening democratic institutions and questioning public officials on pressing societal issues.

A cohort of young adults is actively seeking platforms to learn more about their country's political context and to find ways to work towards building better democratic institutions. This has motivated MCN to create a youth programme that promotes civic values and participation. MCN's Integrantes programme is an opportunity for young people aged 18-35 to take an active role in shaping Guatemala's future.

With a current membership of 30, the programme guarantees a safe environment for undertaking political activism aimed at strengthening democratic institutions. Young people participating in the programme can exchange ideas, develop digital content to help share opinions, attend round tables, present recommendations to change legislation, have conversations with policy experts and interact with public authorities. Within the Integrantes, MCN promotes leadership and provides civic education workshops where young people can discuss specific topics. These include the importance of checks and balances in a Republic, Guatemala's foreign policy, the political situation in Latin America, upcoming elections and the importance of democratic processes.

For some time, interest in the electoral system and democratic processes in Guatemala has come and gone every four years, when the elections are close. This creates time constraints and makes it difficult to push for substantive changes that will improve regulation or promote civic engagement. Through the Integrantes, MCN has mobilised young leaders to address the state of democracy and ways to continuously improve democratic processes in Guatemala, not just at the time when elections are approaching. MCN has had a significant impact in shifting the national conversation from its current pessimistic tone to a more proactive one, by highlighting the importance of free and transparent elections through defining the country's democratic priorities, such as the need for an electoral reform. As a result, the programme encourages citizen participation

and seeks institutional strengthening of Guatemala's main electoral institutions, such as 'Tribunal Supremo Electoral' (TSE), the election management body.

For a number of years, we have pushed for electoral reform to improve citizen participation and representation by enabling Guatemalan citizens to vote directly for their preferred candidates for congress, rather than for a closed party list where candidates are less well-known. MCN urged congressmen to "show their faces" (wording used in the campaign) to publicly announce their stance on the reform. Although some of them felt pressured, another 12 supported the initiative by signing the reform bill that included our proposal for modifying how we vote for our legislative representatives. Members of Integrantes were part of public demonstrations outside Congress, motivating other citizens to join the call for reform. The young people involved expressed commitment and felt motivated to continue participating in activities that bolster their civic engagement.

To promote transparent general elections, MCN conducted activism campaigns to urge the TSE to desist from purchasing dubious technology, which could have jeopardised the transparency of the vote-counting during the 2023 elections. Integrantes members were visiting TSE authorities, giving public statements and developing digital content - such as videos and posts - to raise awareness of what would be at stake if the electoral authorities purchased such technology. As a result, more than 15 organisations joined MCN in pressuring the TSE, resulting in the purchase of the voting technology not being made. This meant that the current process, which has been proven to be reliable, will continue to operate in 2023.

MCN works continuously to strengthen and expand its community, in order to attract more young people to the programme, encouraging them to engage in civil discourse and promote more-transparent general elections. Numerous activism campaigns, both in-person and digital, have demonstrated that Guatemalan youth can engage once they understand the impact that political decisions can have in their everyday life. Through clear messages, easy-to-understand political language and information on public policy decisions that affect our day-to-day lives, MCN has created a community where youth can become informed, educated and participate in a safe space. In the digital space, it has reached over 25,000 people and received hundreds of messages on different platforms from individuals interested in becoming a part of the Integrantes

programme. In the Integrantes, the youth of Guatemala can find a safe and dynamic platform to engage and fight political apathy.

Government decisions affect us all and have the capacity to influence our lives positively or negatively. For young people specifically, it is vital to learn from the mistakes of past generations and to be civically engaged to hold public officials accountable in the fight for fair and free elections. Youth civic participation is the route to increasing citizen engagement and protecting Guatemala's democracy.

### **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

The Movimiento Cívico Nacional (MCN) is a civil society organisation based in Guatemala City. It is focused on promoting the rule of

law, democracy, strengthening public institutions, fostering civic engagement and campaigning for youth participation through activism and policy recommendations.

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**#14**



**NEPAL**

# **MOCK YOUTH PARLIAMENT: YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND MOBILISATION**

## ABSTRACT

The Mock Youth Parliament simulations run by the National Youth Council of Nepal are designed to develop the leadership capabilities of young people aged 16-24, with the guaranteed participation of 50% women. Each year, more than 2500 young people participate in the programme, with the overarching objective of allowing young people to experience how the law-making process works in a parliamentary system such that used by the federal republic of Nepal. Through this Mock Parliament, young people have the opportunity to participate in local- and province-level planning processes, experience the legislation-making process, give timely and concise presentations as parliamentarians, and learn democratic values and norms. A third-party research report undertaken to evaluate the programme concluded that it has inspired young people to become politicians and campaigners for justice and sustainable development as well as to run in elections. In addition, the participants develop soft skills such as communication, decision making, openness to criticism, conflict management, problem solving and teamwork.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The Mock Youth Parliament is an initiative that was first introduced by NGOs in Nepal prior to the establishment of the National Youth Council in 2015. Following the establishment of the Council, the initiative was replicated and expanded by the Council in collaboration with various NGOs. It aims to educate young people on democratic processes and inspire democratic values in them. The objective of the programme is to attract young people into politics through providing them with insights into policy and practice. As political volatility has meant that Nepal has faced numerous challenges, which has seen Nepalese youth become disengaged from politics. As a result, the Council started the practice of mock parliaments to

allow young people to gain hands-on experience of parliamentary processes and to develop their leadership skills.

The programme follows a competition-style process covering multiple levels of government as follows:

- First, the local-level government should formulate ward youth clubs in the first trimester, in line with the fiscal calendar of the government.
- The local-level government should then conduct municipality-level Mock Youth Parliaments during the second trimester.
- Then, in coordination with local, province and federal-level governments, there should be province-level Mock Youth Par-

liaments. Participants should be nominated in a coordinated manner with the agreement of the mentioned government stakeholders.

- In the next phase, federal-level Mock Youth Parliaments take place, in which those youth nominated by the provincial government and the Council participate.
- Finally, the Council forms a loose network among the youth who took part at the various different levels.<sup>1</sup>

## ENABLING FACTORS

The popularity of the Mock Youth Parliament programme arises from the following enabling factors:

- ▶ Interest from young people for taking part in the programme for their leadership development.
- ▶ A clear simulation procedure for conducting a Mock Youth Parliament.
- ▶ Establishment of youth-led government institutions at all three tiers of government and coordination of each of the main political parties.
- ▶ The interest of leaders in developing cultured, mature youth leaders who may someday become parliamentarians and play a positive role in the legislation making process.
- ▶ The opportunity for young people to participate in, and gain first-hand experience of, managing the parliament and the legislation-making process.
- ▶ The opportunity to be connected via a loose network of young people from ward clubs.
- ▶ Partnerships with NGOs.
- ▶ Well-trained and experienced youth trainers.
- ▶ Application of inclusive policy.



## OUTCOMES

- **Youth leadership development and inspiration for youth to become active in politics:** Those young people involved in Mock Youth Parliaments were on the frontline of the collective lobbying process by youth to nominate youth candidates, which has resulted in more than 40% elected youth leaders in local-level elections.
- **The issue of youth is incorporated into policies:** Nepal was recognised with a Future Policy Award (Silver) in 2019 from the World Future Council for formulating progressive policy in the country.
- **Young people can become involved in a network of youth** and access opportunities to become involved in social and ecological issues as campaigners.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

The Mock Youth Parliament simulation is an initiative run by the National Youth Council of Nepal. Throughout the simulation process, the Council coordinates with other government institutions as and when needed. While implementing the policy and programmes,

the Council encourages and empowers those young people who belong to priority and special priority groups in the mainstream of development through the means of positive discrimination.

The National Youth Council is an autonomous government organisation established under National Youth Council Act of Nepal (2015), governed by the National Youth Policy (2015) and guided by the Youth Vision-2025 and Ten-year Strategic Plan. The Youth Vision-2025 is founded on five pillars, which guide the activities of the Council. Youth leadership development and mobilisation is one of the priority pillars under which the Mock Youth Parliament has

been created. This programme is one of the Council's most popular among young people, aiming to encourage them to become leaders and to raise awareness of the various democratic processes taking place from local to federal level.

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<sup>1</sup> Here, local level government means youth-led government stakeholders at local level, province level government means at Province Youth Council or Ministry levels, and federal government means National Youth Council, Ministry of Youth and Sports levels.





**#15**

Netherlands Institute for  
**Multiparty  
Democracy**

**GUATEMALA**

Supported by:



**YOUTH+D:  
MORE DEVELOPMENT,  
MORE DIVERSITY,  
MORE INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY**

## ABSTRACT

NIMD's (Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy) Youth +D project - 'Jóvenes+D' in Spanish - aims to integrate youth perspectives into national and municipal decision making and policy making in Guatemala. By providing capacity building and access to decision-making structures, the project gives young people greater 'power and voice'. The project has delivered concrete results, with participants having successfully influenced the National Youth Policy 2021-2032. In addition, participants in the Youth+D training have co-designed six Municipal Youth Policies.

Thanks to the project, these new policies will reflect the real views, voices and needs of young people. As such, they will be more effective in responding to the realities and challenges facing young persons in Guatemala today. What is more, they will reflect the voices of underrepresented groups, namely young women and young indigenous persons, whose voices too often go unheard in policy making.

Last, creating a network of self-confident young leaders is vital for the sustainability of results and future work to bring about change.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Adaptability:** All of NIMD's activities aim to respond to the lived realities of the participants, adapt to their evolving needs and ensure accessibility for all. For example, one participant recommendation in the municipal trainings was to improve language accessibili-

ty. Hence, depending on the location, the trainings are offered in Mayan languages and the communications materials are produced in Spanish and major Mayan languages.

- ▶ **NIMD as a trusted facilitator:** Crucial to the dialogue process is to ensure that the facilitator is accepted as an

expert by all social and political actors involved. In the municipal dialogues, NIMD's long-standing reputation as an impartial organisation in Guatemala, is key to fostering a safe space that allows trust-building and participation.

- ▶ **Collaborations with the governmental institutions:** NIMD's work with local governments and municipal authorities (such as local mayors and councillors) has been decisive in the dialogue process in the regions. This generates trust and good coordination and encourages key actors to participate. Local government representatives are also part of the dialogues on Municipal Youth Policies, an approach that has helped garner political buy-in for youth perspectives.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The NIMD Youth +D project, supported by Sida, adopts an integrated approach to promoting youth participation, particularly among those from under-represented groups. Through this, NIMD works with young people to reinforce their democratic knowledge, skills and culture.

NIMD supports young people by strengthening their dialogue and presentation skills and providing them with flexible funding. This is to ensure that they are able to influence those in power, present proposals on issues that affect their lives and seek accountability from decision makers.

### Steps towards National Youth Policies

NIMD helped create a participatory process to include youth voices effectively during the development of the Guatemalan National Youth Policy. In 2020, NIMD mobilised and convened a youth movement - the so-called 'Alliance for Youth' - to serve as a technical support body to the National Youth Council.

To kickstart this participatory process, the Alliance for Youth drafted policy recommendations for formulating the new National Youth Policy 2021-2032. The document was called "Six million reasons: proposals from Guatemalan youth for a national youth policy that erad-

icates inequalities", bringing together contributions from 95 (youth) collectives. The National Youth Council incorporated these recommendations into the development of the National Youth Policy.

In 2021 and 2022, NIMD provided financial and advocacy support for the Alliance for Youth to continue lobbying for the new National Youth Policy. By the end of 2022, the draft policy had been reviewed by the Presidency's Secretariat of Planning and Programing and is currently pending review before final approval.

### From a National Youth Policy towards Municipal Youth Policies

A National Youth Policy is one thing, but translating results to the local level is another. NIMD developed a participatory methodology for guiding young people working in the municipality to join a participatory dialogue process for developing a Municipal Youth Policy.

### About the stages

Youth +D consists of three stages: training through a Diploma in Knowledge to Transform, organisational reinforcement for participating on the municipal stage, and dialogue processes.

The Diploma in Knowledge to Transform trains young people from different backgrounds on democratic competencies. Participants attended weekly, two-hour sessions (online, due to COVID-19) with an assigned teacher over four months as well as conferences with thematic experts. To allow the young people to become true agents of change, they were trained in modules on relations of power in Guatemala, multidimensional poverty, power, oppression and political subjects, the environment, and political innovation. Almost 300 young people from five departments were trained by 2022, including 209 women.

*"The training processes have helped me to know ideas and perspectives different from mine. I have learnt to listen, and every time I left with other ideas in mind that have helped me to discover new situations. I also made friends with people from political parties with different ideologies, which was enriching to my political journey."*

**Fabiana Tejax, 27 years old**

After imparting knowledge and skills through these trainings, NIMD continues its support, coaching participants to take part in the dialogue process on six Municipal Youth Policies. These were co-designed through a dialogue process by youth leaders and youth-led

organisations working on a departmental and municipal level in rural areas of Guatemala, with NIMD support. Through this, we also focus on including voices that often go unheard, such as those of young women and indigenous youth.

By the end of 2022, four of six Municipal Youth Policies had been approved with two under review. Once the policies have been approved, it is important to follow up - through, for example, the elaboration of operational plans - to ensure commitment and action and ensure a longer-term impact.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) works to promote peaceful, just and inclusive politics worldwide. We believe inclusiveness is the key to a successful democracy. Democracies will only thrive when all groups have equal opportunities to play their role in political life and work for the common good of their country. This is why our approach is characterised by dialogue and impartiality; we bring people together from across the political spectrum, from aspiring politicians to established leaders and from the national to local levels. Providing democracy support across five key thematic areas, we empower political actors to cooperate

constructively on the issues that affect them, their country, and the broader region, helping them reach out to citizens and truly listen to their needs.

As part of this work, we engage young leaders to become agents of change, empowering them to make democratic values and human rights prevail. NIMD focuses on reinforcing young persons' capacities to participate in politics. We facilitate (intergenerational) dialogue between youth and (senior) decision makers and provide technical expertise to youth and politicians to enhance youth participation and youth-sensitive policies.

Working with young people is also at the heart of our work in Guatemala, where NIMD has been active for more than 20 years. Given Guatemala's diverse demographics, we focus on promoting the inclusion of underrepresented groups to ensure their role in decision making in the future. Our Democracy School in Guatemala brings together people from across the country to build their skills, share knowledge, promote dialogue, exchange experience and inspire each other to continue to work for the betterment of the country.

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**#16**



**GLOBAL**

**DELIVERING FOR YOUTH:  
HOW GOVERNMENTS CAN  
PUT YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE  
CENTRE OF THE RECOVERY**

## ABSTRACT

Young people have been hit hard by the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and have expressed concerns over its long-term implications, including on satisfaction with democracy and intergenerational justice. In response, by the end of 2021, at least 34 OECD countries had presented government-wide response and recovery plans; of these, 29 include specific commitments on young people. Some 10 OECD countries have set out how young people have been consulted in the formulation of their plans, but only eight have stated how they will engage young people in implementing their national response and recovery plans. This case study shows how systematic governance changes and innovation in public administration are required to incorporate young people's perspectives and longer-term considerations into policymaking. The case study draws on the OECD policy paper, 'Delivering for youth: How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery'.

## ENABLING FACTORS

Several factors enable successful incorporation of young people's perspectives into policymaking:

- ▶ Adequate administrative and institutional capacities, as well as innovative public administration tools, to mainstream the perspectives of young people across policy and service areas.
- ▶ Measures to strengthen the participation and representation of young people and youth stakeholders in public and political life.

- ▶ Holistic, cross-sectoral and coordinated youth strategies to unite various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders behind a joint vision and strategy.

## DESCRIPTION

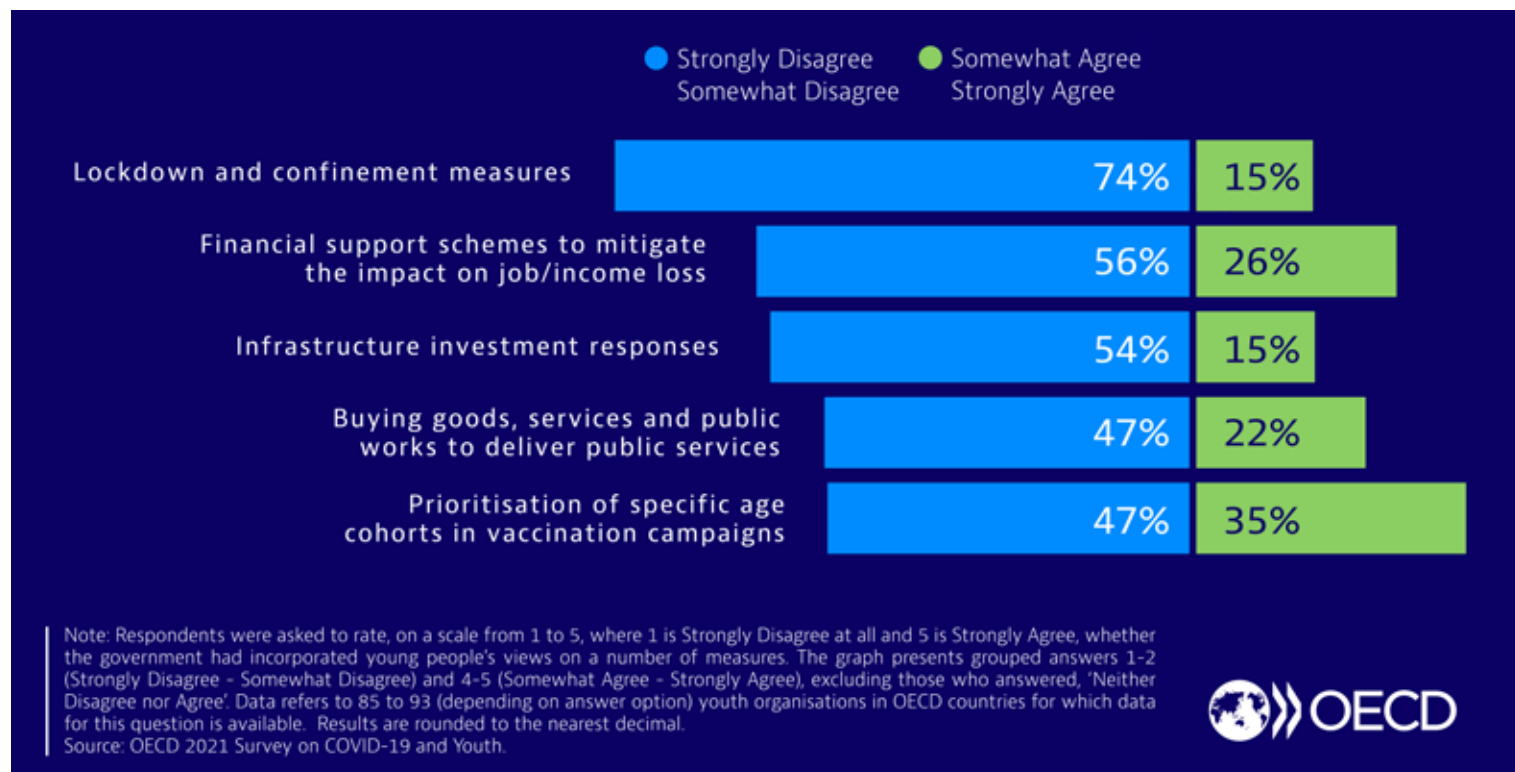
Various indicators have shown that young people have been hit hard by the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, they are expressing increasing concerns over its long-term implications, including over satisfaction with democracy and intergenerational justice.<sup>1</sup>

During the pandemic, emergency regulations limited the opportunities for stakeholder participation in decision making. Among a (non-representative) sample of 100 youth organisations based in 36 OECD countries surveyed by the OECD, only 15% felt their government were considering young people’s views when adopting lockdown and confinement measures. Furthermore, only 33% of the organisations who responded were satisfied with how governments had collaborated with institutions and civil society organisations to mitigate the effects of the crisis.

By the end of 2021, in response to the crisis, at least 34 OECD countries had presented government-wide response and recovery plans to address the complex economic, environmental and social impacts of the pandemic. Of OECD countries with a comparable national response and recovery plan in place, 29 of 32 included policies, programmes or other commitments specifically aimed at young people. Some 10 OECD countries have set out how young people were consulted during the process; for example in Australia,

Austria, Estonia, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic, public consultations included youth organisations as key stakeholders.

In Austria, consultations were held with representatives of federal states, cities, municipalities, social partners, NGOs, youth organisations and other relevant civil society stakeholders. Each measure proposed by civil society organisations – including those from youth organisations – was set out in a spreadsheet, showing the commitments for different sectors and groups, including for young people and future generations. In Australia, a list of those youth organisations that had provided feedback on the 2021-22 budget priorities is publicly available. In addition, non-confidential submissions – including those of youth organisations – were made accessible online. Estonia included its National Youth Council as a key partner in the consultations that led up to the creation of its response and recovery plan. In Mexico, the Institute of Youth (IMJUVE), the Ministry of Health and the Population Council surveyed more than 50,000 young people on the topics of education, employment, health, vio-



lence and resilience. The evidence gathered was used to create the VoCEs-19 report. This in turn informed the design, implementation and analysis of public policies at a sectoral level, which are responsive to social sensitivity and the needs of young people.

Almost all of the youth organisations surveyed by the OECD during July and August 2021 were engaged in addressing the effects of the pandemic. Notwithstanding these youth-led efforts, by the end of 2021 only eight OECD countries had stated in their national response and recovery plans how they would engage young people in implementing the commitments that were relevant to them. Most frequently, the plans envisaged having young people and their organisations running digital campaigns, providing mental health support and delivering education and employment programmes.

National COVID-19 response and recovery plans have developed cross-governmental, long-term strategies to address the complex economic, environmental and social effects of the pandemic, involving the mobilisation of large amounts of public resources. All the recovery plans that benefitted from consulting with youth organisations or young people included commitments to youth, along with budget dedicated to implementing them. However, despite significant efforts by some countries to identify innovative ways of incorporating young people's perspectives and longer-term considerations into the recovery, public administration requires further systematic changes and innovation to address existing and future societal and economic challenges.<sup>2</sup>

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

The OECD is a global economic forum working with 38 member countries and more than 100 emerging and developing economies to make better policies for better lives. Our mission is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world. The Public Governance Directorate (GOV) supports countries in promoting good governance through more-strategic, agile and action-oriented public sectors that both improve the functioning of national economies and support growth. The Youth Empowerment and Intergenerational Justice Unit within GOV supports OECD member and non-member countries in building administrative capacity in line with the principles and standards as set out in the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People. These include:

- Designing and delivering policies and services that are responsive to the needs of young people and that support their transition to an autonomous life.
- Encouraging participation by young people from different backgrounds in public and political life as well as democratic processes, strengthening their representation in state institutions and building their trust in government.
- Delivering fair policy outcomes for all age groups in order to promote intergenerational justice.

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1 OECD (2020), Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>; OECD (2022), Delivering for youth: How governments can put young people at the centre of the recovery, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/delivering-for-youth-how-governments-can-put-young-people-at-the-centre-of-the-recovery-92c9d060/>.

2 Policy principles to strengthen public governance for youth empowerment can be found in OECD (2022), Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0474>.





**#17**



**SWEDEN**

**CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE:  
GIRLS AND BOYS AS  
CHANGEMAKERS FOR  
GENDER EQUALITY**

## ABSTRACT

Champions of Change is Plan International's community-wide strategy for promoting gender equality and social norm change through youth engagement and peer-to-peer mobilisation. In Sweden, this strategy has inspired a programme that features an educational youth camp, with follow-up meetings and activities. The objective is to enhance children and young people's knowledge of their rights, global development issues, gender equality and advocacy. The programme allowed for meaningful youth participation, increasing understanding of the importance of gender equality and reinforcing youth engagement with topics that affect children and youth rights and gender equality.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **With and for young people:** This was a youth-led project with meaningful youth participation. From start to finish, young people were central in drafting the funding application and planning both the project and the camp. They also acted as youth leaders or participants in the camp as well as in the follow-up meetings and evaluation. Such an approach is essential in delivering a project that was truly with and for young people.
- ▶ **Do no harm:** Plan International always prioritises and works towards the safety of all children and young people in all its activities. This includes putting in place a thorough safeguarding policy as well as undertaking risk assessments prior to any activity that involves children and young people.

- ▶ **Base of knowledge:** Through its work around the world over many years, Plan International has developed broad expertise on youth participation and gender equality; Champions of Change is an excellent example of bringing this knowledge together to become creative, to think outside the box and to create interactive activities and learning opportunities together with young people. It also seeks to take advantage of digital tools in order to continue working together after the camp and the meetings.
- ▶ **Young people meeting one other:** Young and active people need places to come together and meet, so that each region feels represented. This project addresses this need and provides young people with a platform to do something positive about the issues they identify both in their communities and on a global level.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Plan International works with children and young people with the goal of shifting the agenda towards gender equality. Inspired by the global Champions of Change strategy, Plan International Sweden developed 'Champions of Change Sweden', a programme with separate but interrelated journeys of change for both boys and girls. For girls, this journey focuses on self-esteem, rights awareness, collective power and economic empowerment. For boys, it focuses on learning how to avoid contributing to inequality, transforming discriminatory attitudes and behaviours and learning how to



support girls' rights and gender equality. It also shows them how to stand up for their LGBTQIA+ peers and to help build communities free from stigma, exclusion and violence.

Champions of Change Sweden was created together with the organisation's youth advisory panel. Its purpose is to enhance children and young people's knowledge of global development issues, children and youth rights, gender equality and advocacy. It also provides them with the necessary tools to engage in, and contribute to, sustainable development and a more equal world.

Camp participants are aged 15-19 and come from various parts of Sweden. After they have participated in the camp, Plan International Sweden invites them to follow-up meetings and activities. This works as an extension of the camp, to create a platform for young people to continue with their engagement and to share their knowledge and their experiences.

## KEY OUTCOMES

- Increased knowledge of the rights and challenges that children and young people face, with a focus on gender equality.



**Khonaf**  
Member of Plan International Sweden  
Youth Advisory Panel and Champions of  
Change advocate

“ To work with Plan International and participate in Champions of Change Sweden gives me loads of new experiences. I am proud to be a part of a global movement that spreads hope of a just and gender equal world.



**Soalbin**  
Member of Plan International Sweden  
Youth Advisory Panel and Champions of  
Change advocate

“ By being a part of Plan International, I have learnt that anyone can be a part of creating change. I use my voice to help others raise theirs. Are you with us?

- Increased understanding of the need to work to accommodate gender equality from an early age in order to achieve just and sustainable global development.
- Better conditions for young people to engage in topics that concern children and young people's rights and gender equality.
- Network of young people who can be continuously supported in their development.
- Motivated engagement throughout the country and reached more people of different ages through the Champions of Change participants.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

Plan International is an organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners.

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**#18**



**ALBANIA**

**CO-DESIGNING WITH  
YOUNG PEOPLE:  
FINANCING YOUTH-LED  
AND YOUTH-DRIVEN  
INITIATIVES**

Supported by:



## ABSTRACT

The challenges facing young people in Albania may not be unique, but the actions being taken to transform these challenges into opportunities are. Among other issues, these young people – particularly those living in the pilot cities of this programme – are at risk of becoming involved in criminal activities from a very early age. RAYS (Reconnecting Albanian Youth and Society) is focused on directing this particular at-risk group towards positive life choices and alternative pathways as they grow. It is aimed at creating an enabling environment that allows them to engage in extra-curricular initiatives, designed both with and for them.

The initiatives that RAYS has undertaken are focused on art and sport as well as providing young people with soft skills such as leadership, advocacy, teamwork and conflict resolution. Through the ‘Youth-Led Initiative’ – a funding scheme in support of youth-driven community actions, RAYS is currently mentoring 12 groups of young people in implementing 12 community and advocacy campaigns. Bringing young people and other local stakeholders together to change the status quo and address some of the problems that most concern their communities was key to the successful implementation of these youth-led and youth-driven initiatives.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

As part of the efforts to direct young people’s life choices away from crime, RAYS has created the ‘Youth-Led Initiative’. This allows young people aged 14-18, living in three Albanian cities, the chance to engage in youth engagement and youth activism. The initiative features youth-driven actions that promote social cohesion and inclusion, encourage civic engagement and informed decision-making, promote art- and sport-based activities and encourage responsible

actions for environmental integrity. A new funding scheme, worth up to UK£2500, made available to 12 groups of young people. This equipped them with the financial resources, tools, skills and access to policymaking bodies to address some of their own needs and allowed them to implement a series of local community and advocacy campaigns.

RAYS sought to address the fundamental issues this particular at-risk group faces and direct them to positive life choices, away from crime.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ **Adopting a coproduction space:** RAYS has identified that one of the key solutions to be both inclusive and successful is to meaningfully involve young people and children in the design and delivery process of the RAYS initiatives. Adopting a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach – which takes no account of individual needs – is ineffective when it comes to addressing the needs of young people and the communities in which they live. RAYS treats young people as equal partners in the decisions that impact them. By codesigning and cocreating alongside young people and other local stakeholders, RAYS ensures the results obtained meet the needs of those young people.
- ▶ **Building on the potential of youth:** Aiming to empower these leading groups of young people, RAYS has improved their project management and advocacy skills in order to ensure they have the tools and abilities required to implement their initiatives and become agents of change. Through this, RAYS has achieved more than just providing a platform for these young people to share their know-how. It is also changing the narratives and perspectives that surround how young people can become an integral part of local solutions.
- ▶ **Supporting collaborative governance:** RAYS fosters a collaborative environment and is supporting these young people in sitting at the table with policymakers at a local level. For example, some of the groups have brought to the attention of their local governments the need for specific actions on matters of public space use, youth engagement and informed decision making.

The implementation of the Youth-Led Initiative is still ongoing. The fact that young people are being given the chance to be heard is an important step towards connecting them with key stakeholders at a local level. Young people consider the Youth-Led Initiative as an important experience, as it is helping to bridge the gap and create links between youth and local institutions in their cities. This benefits the youth community as a whole. In terms of impact, when we speak with the young people involved about the impact of these initiatives, one thing in particular resonates with them. It is the idea that once they are better equipped with financial resources and skills and meaningfully involved in the design and implementation process, they are genuinely empowered to bring about positive change within the communities where they live.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

RAYS is a two-year programme funded by the UK Home Office (2021-2023), implemented by Palladium in collaboration with Bournemouth University, Sustainable Criminal Justice Solutions (SCJS) and the Child Rights Centre Albania (CRCA). The programme aims to help young people in Albania choose alternative and positive pathways for the future.

### Contacts:

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**#19**



Search for  
**Common Ground**

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC,  
MALI AND SOUTH SUDAN**

**YOUTH TALK: YOUTH  
VOICES FOR CHANGE  
IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED  
COUNTRIES**

## ABSTRACT

Growing up with albinism, Harouna felt estranged from those around him. However, since joining other young people in hosting 'Youth Talk' radio shows, he has been confidently and powerfully reporting on Mali's most salient issues. "This project, the other participants, allowed me to be me, accept myself. I tell other kids to listen to us, to heed the voices that have the power to make you believe in yourself," he says.

The Youth Talk project, initiated by Search for Common Ground (Search), has amplified the voice and agency of hundreds of young people like Harouna in the countries of Mali, South Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR). As well as enabling youth journalists to produce high-quality radio programmes, Youth Talk has increased their awareness of their role and capacities as agents of change. It has also fostered their motivation, entrepreneurialism and success. By giving young people opportunities to raise issues through their own radio programmes, the project has had a positive impact on wider community perceptions of youth perspectives, including on challenging issues such as forced marriage. This has contributed to the inclusion of youth in shaping media discourse as a central element of democracy in the three countries.

## ENABLING FACTORS

The following factors were crucial in achieving the project's impact:

- ▶ Search took a holistic approach to **accessibility and inclusion**, with context-specific selection criteria that focused on diverse and harder-to-reach participants.

- ▶ To ensure meaningful involvement, the project design addressed different **barriers to participation**, for example through a tailored safeguarding policy to address protection concerns arising from the conflict-affected contexts and an increased public profile. Close engagement with parents, guardians and caregivers helped reduce normative barriers relating to

the participants' gender, age and other identity factors. Resource barriers were addressed through measures such as the provision of food and contributions to school fees.

- ▶ The project used **radio as a suitable medium**, as it acted as the main source of information in all project locations. It was used to provide platforms for young people to be heard and take part in dialogues on those issues that affect them.
- ▶ To enable **transformative change** in young people's place in society, the project also bridged intergenerational divides and reinforced mutual understanding, for example through home visits and community consultations in Mali.
- ▶ To enable participants to address difficult issues in their own radio programmes, they were trained on radio journalism and conflict transformation including skills such as research, editorial practice, conflict analysis and active listening. The young journalists were also helped to build up their **emotional resilience**, including sessions to prepare them for dealing with potentially traumatic stories shared by interviewees.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Young people make up the majority of the population in Mali, South Sudan and the CAR. Yet recent peace negotiations and other political processes in these conflict-affected countries have mainly been limited to adult elites. To support young people in being heard on important issues and to help them shape their societies, Search initiated the 'Youth Talk' project, supported by the Bezos Family Foundation. In 2019-2022, Youth Talk worked to empower young people in the three countries through radio programming.

Search trained over 350 youth journalists from Mali, South Sudan and the CAR on how to produce and facilitate interactive radio programmes. These young people reported on local conflicts and used

their unique stories to tackle difficult issues in their communities, speaking about issues such as forced marriage, violence against minorities and their first-hand experience of the impact of war on their education. They worked to find solutions to these problems, reaching out to thousands of their peers across the three countries and uniting their voices. To provide a common platform for young people and adults, the project also established consultative workshops and intergenerational dialogue sessions with community members.

By elevating youth voices and perspectives, Youth Talk contributed to more-inclusive media discourses as a central element of democracy in Mali, South Sudan and the CAR. An external evaluation conducted in 2022 found that the radio shows had successfully brought youth voices to the forefront. Indeed, some 90% of community members who listened to the young journalists' radio programmes agreed that these added value to critical social and political issues, a considerable increase from 43%, when Youth Talk was launched. The project showed that the media has the ability to leverage youth's change-making power, influence the social norms surrounding them, popularise their perspectives and ensure that they participate in decision-making, ultimately creating a more peaceful, democratic society for all.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

Search for Common Ground is a Nobel Peace Prize-nominated international peacebuilding NGO, with 40 years' experience of working in more than 40 countries. We prevent violence and build societal resilience in some of the world's most complex conflicts and fragile societies throughout Africa, the Middle East and Central, South and South-East Asia. We do this through helping divided people trust one other, collaborate on shared challenges and make breakthroughs for peace, together. We are a locally based, global organisation, with headquarters in Belgium and in the United States and around 1000 staff around the world.

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**Cover photo:** Youth Talk participant Harouna recording a radio show in Mali



#20

**Sensitise Uganda**  
*Illuminating Ugandans for Development & Positive Transformation*

**UGANDA**

Supported by:



**ENHANCING YOUTH CIVIC  
PARTICIPATION THROUGH  
MOCK ELECTIONS**

## ABSTRACT

In 2020, Sensitise Uganda implemented a project entitled 'Enhancing secondary students' civic participation through mock elections'. The project aimed to use mock elections as a tool/approach for empowering secondary school students with civic education, in order to enhance their civic participation in Uganda. It was implemented with guidance from the Electoral Commission of Uganda.

The project endowed students with political, civic and voter knowledge and capacity by giving them the opportunity to participate in mock elections as political candidates, speech writers, agents of political candidates, election observers, empowered voters and responsible citizens. This was achieved through providing the technical aspects and issues involved in an election and leadership, giving students a platform to engage in active citizenship. A total of 467 students from three secondary schools participated in the mock elections. Of these, 19 students contested in the Presidential mock elections in their respective schools. These were held transparently, and the processes were guided by the Electoral Commission of Uganda. A mock elections toolkit was developed to steer the implementation.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ Smooth collaboration and a good working relationship with the Electoral Commission of Uganda.
- ▶ Technical support from the Electoral Commission (EC).
- ▶ Commitment from the students that participated in the project.

- ▶ Support and commitment from the schools and the teachers.
- ▶ Commitment from the staff of Sensitise Uganda and partners.
- ▶ Donor's trust (Voice).
- ▶ Access to financial resources.

- ▶ A good working political environment in the country.
- ▶ The ability to bring on board a range of stakeholders.
- ▶ The ability to conduct all activities systematically and in line with the law

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Sensitise Uganda identified a gap in the civic and voter education space in Ugandan schools. This led to the creation of a project entitled 'Enhancing secondary school students' civic participation through mock elections', which was funded by Voice. Voice is an initiative by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is implemented by a consortium of Oxfam, Novib and Hivos. The project was implemented between June 2020 and March 2021.

A mock election is one that is organised for educational and transformative purposes. It is often used as part of voter education and also during mock governments, particularly in school and university bodies. They are usually organised in secondary schools and universities to introduce young people to the differing ideals and concepts of democracy before they become eligible to vote.

Mock elections mirror the format of an actual election setting, where first-time voters are taken through the process of voting, have their rights explained and told the 'dos and don'ts'. A physical polling station is laid out using real ballot boxes, seals, ink pads, dummy ballot papers and dummy declaration forms. The students are then guided on how to physically vote using the dummy ballot papers. Going through the process gives the students a better understanding of democratic institutions like local governments, the Electoral Commission, Parliament and other arms of government, such as the police force and the military. Overall, this helps to prepare them for their role as voters, potential political candidates and responsible citizens.

The project was implemented in partnership with the Electoral Commission of Uganda and three secondary schools, namely the Kyambogo College School, the Progressive Secondary School Kitintale and the Mariam High School Kisaasi.

The first step was to develop a mock elections toolkit along with the Electoral Commission, which guided the project on conducting civic and voter education in schools.

Civic and voter education took place in all three schools, including support for all the schools to hold mock Presidential debates and campaigns, introducing students to how political candidates debate and conduct campaigns. A number of students volunteered to adopt different mock political positions and campaigned for votes.

Real ballot papers were developed, with the photos, names and political parties of the different students volunteering to contest the mock election. Mock polling days were organised and students voted for the mock candidates using real ballot papers, real ballot boxes and real polling booths.

To help students understand leadership and democracy better, Sensitise Uganda worked with teachers in the secondary schools and provided mentorship and coaching for the students.

A linking and learning event for schools was organised to bring students together to reflect and share insights into how the project supported them. It also looked at how they used the information they had received when participating in the 2021 general elections and other national civic activities. A number of challenges and successes we shared by the students.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

Sensitise Uganda is one of the leading governance and civic engagement civil society organisations in Uganda. It works towards contributing to the government's efforts of promoting participatory democracy and good governance in Uganda. Sensitise Uganda is a non-partisan, non-governmental organisation that envisions an informed, coherent, sensitised, transformed and developed Uganda. Sensitise Uganda's mission is to sensitise, raise awareness and build the capacity of all Ugandans to address socioeconomic and ideological challenges through implementing projects and programmes that improve the livelihoods of Ugandan citizens and contribute to the country's development process. Our programming is premised on five thematic pillars; governance and accountability; research, policy and advocacy; leadership development; youth empowerment and health and environment. Currently, Sen-

sitise Uganda is undertaking initiatives in voter and civic education, youth leadership development and advancing electoral reforms in Uganda.

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<sup>1</sup> The toolkit is available and can be shared with interested stakeholders.



# KWALE YOUTH ASSEMBLY

“VIJANA KWA JAMII NA MAENDELEO”  
YOUTH FOR COMMUNITY AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



KWALE YOUTH ASSEMBLY

YOUTH ASSEMBLY

(KWALE)



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Center

**KENYA**

**THE YOUTH ASSEMBLIES  
IN KENYA: A PLATFORM  
FOR LOCAL DIALOGUE**

## ABSTRACT

For many decades, young people in Kenya have remained at the periphery of decision-making processes and excluded from participation in democratic processes. The Oslo Center's programme established three Youth Assemblies with structures in all the villages and wards in three counties. These Assemblies have provided a platform for young people to constructively engage with policy makers in order to integrate perspectives and priorities. This empowers young people to take a role as civic watchdogs, by monitoring and tracking governmental implementation of development projects and demand better service delivery.

## ENABLING FACTORS

The programme has enhanced young people's capacity to influence policy and the legislative agenda in their communities. Its success is built on the convergence between capacity of the youth developed, structured and consistent support combined with buy-in and political goodwill. The factors include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ a legal framework that fixes youth inclusion in law
- ▶ local, youth-led ownership of the programme, driven with technical support from the Oslo Center
- ▶ a structure, approach and processes for youth assemblies that focus on constructive input to policy design, implementation and oversight
- ▶ long-term, consistent capacity building, technical support establishing community and governance actors'

trust at sub-national and national level, demystifying conservative perspectives on how youth adds value

- ▶ continuous collaboration and development through policy dialogue for youth to be responsible citizens for public good.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Youth have been largely peripheral in political and socioeconomic affairs in Kenya, lacking a platform where they could engage and drive their agenda and challenges. Youth inclusion in governance processes was disorganised, disjointed, ad-hoc and at best, tokenistic. Those in urban centres and those closer to authorities were more likely to enjoy greater access and support, while less-privileged youth remain peripheral.

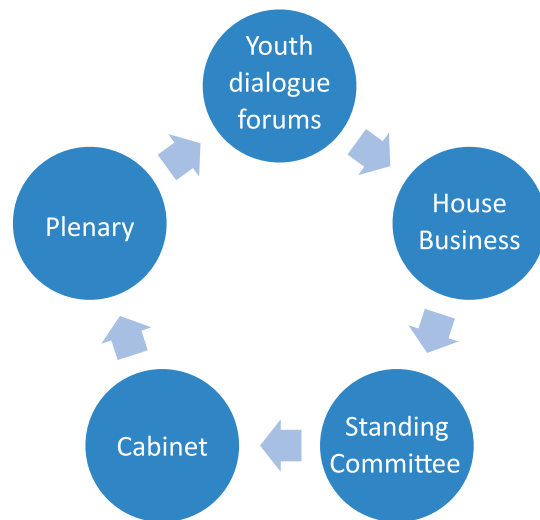
The programme’s goal was to increase youth participation in advocating for transparency, accountability and integrity in public service delivery in the three counties of Kenya. The approach was to establish a platform for local dialogue through inclusive, constructive and consultative processes, identify areas of concern for youth, and develop policy proposals and recommendations for government.

The Youth Assembly’s operational approach relies on its policy cycle. This method provides an avenue for inclusive, participatory, constructive and meaningful engagement between youth, sub-national and national policy makers, service providers and relevant actors. They can address their challenges through this bottom-up approach.

The ‘Barazas’ are youth-led consultative forums at grassroots level addressing policy and administrative gaps and redress proposals.

House business, standing committee and cabinet sittings entail audit and verification of the information and data from the Barazas and the generation of reports.

Plenary sessions are whole-house deliberations on these reports, which conclude with the adoption of youth policy proposals that the youth will subsequently advocate toward their government to adopt.



## OUTCOMES

### A platform to drive the youth agenda

The establishment of three youth assemblies helped identify the challenges facing youth and the subsequent lobbying and advocacy work required. The Assemblies engaged young people in various wards through Barazas. The areas of concerns identified - and the information collected - is used to develop policy interventions deliberated in plenary. The plenaries provide an avenue for the youth leadership to discuss and develop policies and resolutions, which are then forwarded to the respective sub-national or national governments for action.

### Enhanced advocacy through policy change

The youth in the three counties have improved awareness among peers of the need to identify challenges and provide policy recommendations for adoption and implementation by the government. They advocated for, and achieved, enactment of the National Kenyan Blue Economy Policy Framework, with recommendations incorporating youth employment quotas in blue and ocean resources.

The Lamu Youth Assembly petitioned to amend the 2019 county bursary fund bill, advocating expanded access and eligibility criteria for students from poorer backgrounds in pursuit of higher learning – an affirmative action measure designed to reverse decades of systemic marginalisation.

The Kwale Youth Assembly, through its integration and involvement in the Community Development Agreement Committee, has advocated for an empowerment fund for young people, women and persons with disabilities. In addition, the Assembly and other key stakeholders combined to advocate for full implementation of mining and royalties’ laws, which will reap major dividends for the community once enforced.

### Youth Assemblies as a leadership incubation hub

The main goal of the Youth Assembly was to strengthen capacity and increase the participation of youth in policy contribution, transparency, accountability and integrity advocacy in service delivery by offering alternative leadership perspectives.

### Youth Assemblies as a channel to amplify the voices of the communities

The Youth Assemblies in Lamu and Kwale counties conducted their first-ever political debates during the campaign period in the run

up to the August 2022 general elections, with technical assistance from the Oslo Center. This provided a platform for constructive and robust debate on policy priorities as a matter of public interest. This was a departure from earlier electoral cycles, in that it allowed youth from outside the political class to discuss the challenges faced by citizens. This established a baseline for the electorate to reward or sanction the political class in subsequent elections.

### **Youth as agents of peace before, during and after elections**

The phenomenon of electoral violence in Kenya has been exacerbated by ethnic politics. This violence has seen loss of life and livelihoods, destruction of property, and an economic slow-down. As observed in the 2007-2008 post-election violence, young people are both the main perpetrators and victims, misused by the political class.<sup>1</sup> As 2022 was an electoral year in Kenya, the progressive platform offered by the Youth Assemblies in Kwale and Lamu played a critical role in promoting peace.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

The Oslo Center was founded in 2006 as a democracy support organisation focusing on supporting democratisation processes. The

Center's vision is to support democratic systems that respond to citizens' needs and respect their meaningful participation, human rights and human dignity. Our approach to democracy assistance is to work with local partners and provide technical assistance to promote and enhance democratic practices through strengthening governance, political and government institutions and civic spaces. The Oslo Center takes a bottom-up, participative coaching approach focusing on aiding our partners on their democratic journey. It is important that democracy is not imposed ideologically but rather organically developed to meet the needs and vision of a given nation. It is ultimately a reflection of a socio-political structure that influences citizens' behaviour and well-being. The Center's approach therefore focuses on facilitating and enacting a local democratic vision defined by local needs, context and aspirations. This both assists local ownership and creates a support structure to allow local agents to be the drivers of change, strengthening the sustainability of our programmatic engagements.

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<sup>1</sup> Njogu, K. (Ed.), (2009). Healing the Wound. Personal Narratives about the 2007 Post-Election Violence in Kenya: Personal Narratives about the 2007 Post-election Violence in Kenya. African Books Collective.



**#22**

**UNDI18**

**MALAYSIA**

**UNDI18: LOWERING THE  
VOTING AGE IN MALAYSIA**

## ABSTRACT

Following the implementation of the Undi18 Amendment, an estimated 5.8 million new voters have been added to Malaysia's electoral roll, increasing the total number of eligible voters by 40%. This is significant step forward for Malaysian democracy, and one that could not have taken place without the efforts of Undi18, a youth-led campaign that advocated for the Constitutional Amendment through continuous engagement, lobbying, digital campaigning and coordinated protests.

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

Undi18 (Translation: Vote18), a youth-led campaign in Malaysia, advocated for reducing the minimum voting age in Malaysia from 21 to 18 years old, in line with the minimum voting age of 18 in most other countries (both Western and in Southeast Asia). The current situation, combined with the steadily increasing proportion of young people among Malaysia's population, was creating a tremendous barrier to the implementation of true democracy.

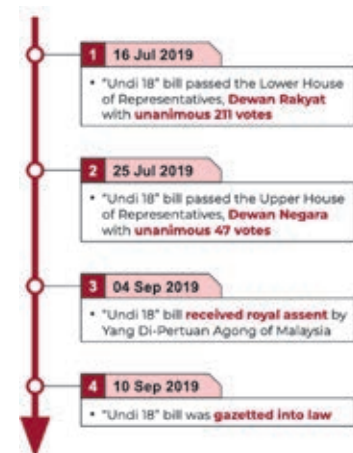
The Undi18 campaign was initiated by then-university students Tharma Pillai and Qyira Yusri in 2016, as a student movement, under the umbrella of the Malaysian



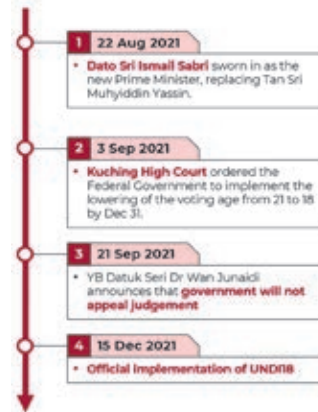
Students' Global Alliance. This gave Undi18 access to numerous student/youth organisations throughout Malaysia and around the world. The campaign argued that 18-year-olds are considered adults by law in Malaysia and should therefore have the right to vote.

In 2019, the Undi18 campaign achieved a historic triple Constitutional Amendment. This saw the minimum age, both for voting and for elected representatives, reduced and allowed for automatic voter registration in Malaysia. This was the first-ever Constitutional Amendment Bill in Malaysian history with unanimous votes in both the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament.

The Constitutional Amendment Bill became law on 10 September 2019. However, due to the technical challenges, full implementation was scheduled for July 2021.



In March 2021, the new government decided to postpone the implementation of the Constitutional Amendment Bill by a further 14 months without any clear justification. Undi18 led a coalition of youth organisations and youth wings of political parties to organise a series of popular protests against the postponement. It also initiated a lawsuit against the Prime Minister, the Election Commission and the Malaysian Federal Government. In September 2021, the High Court of Kuching decided in favour of Undi18, compelling the government to implement the Bill no later than 31 December 2021. Public pressure forced the government not to appeal the court order, and the Bill was implemented on 15 December 2021. One month later, once the voter rolls had been updated, 5.8 million new voters joined the Malaysian electoral system overnight, a 40% increase in the total number of voters in the country.

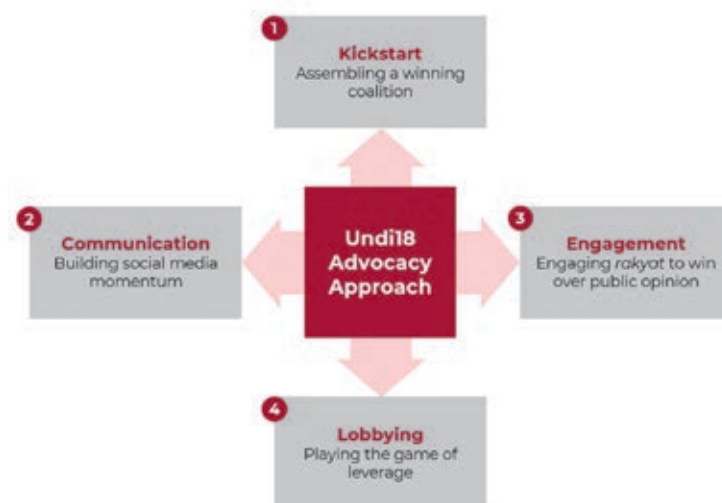


## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ The campaign used a four-point advocacy approach: **kickstart, communication, engagement, lobbying**. This strategy sought to balance established advocacy tools such as lobbying and coalition building with newer approaches based on digital campaigning.
- ▶ Undi18 was Malaysia's **first civil society organisation that began as a digital campaign**. This primarily relied on social media to drive the messaging, using Twitter and Instagram as the main platforms as these were most popular with youth people. Online tools were also developed for supporters to automatically email their Members of Parliament, in order to pressure them on the Bill.
- ▶ Undi18's approach was aggressively multi-partisan, **seeking to work with all sides of the political divide**,

be they progressive or conservative political parties and coalitions.

- ▶ This included **outreach to conservative Islamic religious leaders** for their support. This was an unusual strategy for progressive organisations, but proved effective in shifting public support in Undi18's favour.
- ▶ **Working closely with progressive or reformist government Ministers** to advocate for the cause within government was an effective strategy. It was important to stress that this initiative was first and foremost about youth empowerment and strengthening Malaysian democracy.
- ▶ Finally, the campaign's advocacy had to be fearless. Pushing through reforms with a hesitant or hostile public is challenging, yet it is vital to **continuously engage and provide answers**. Many members of the public who had initially opposed lowering of the voting age changed their minds as a result of this engagement. When facing harassment from the police during anti-government demonstrations in 2021, it was important to remain fearless and to keep pushing until the battle was won.





Protests by youth in response to the announced delays to the implementation of the "Undi18 Bill" – March 2021 (Picture credit: The Star)

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

Undi18 (Persatuan Pengundi Muda) is a social enterprise focusing on voter education and youth public policy engagement. Promoting a youth-centric agenda and democratic reforms, Undi18 aims to bridge the gap between politicians, policymakers and youth. We help Malaysians to read and understand policies beyond politics.

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Cofounders of Undi18, Qyira and Tharma, speaking at the Seeds For Democracy event by Undi18

**Cover photo:** Lawsuit led by Tharma Pillai and Qyira Yusri, to challenge the postponement on the Bill in court. With us are our lawyers and the 18 to 20 year-old plaintiffs





**#23**

 ELECTION-WATCH.EU

**AUSTRIA AND ALBANIA**

**NON-PARTISAN YOUTH  
ENGAGEMENT IN THE  
ELECTORAL PROCESSES:  
INCREASING YOUTH  
PARTICIPATION IN  
AUSTRIA AND BEYOND**

## ABSTRACT

In 2007, the voting age in Austria was reduced to 16 years, an approach increasingly being adopted in Europe, notably for the European Parliament elections. However, the spectrum of citizenship education for this age group depends on the type of school and therefore does not reach all first-time voters. Studies show that election turnout can rise when lowering the voting age is combined with sufficient civic and voter education.<sup>1</sup> They have also revealed that young people casting their vote for a second time are more likely to remain active voters in adult life.<sup>2</sup>

This is why the civil society initiative 'wahlbeobachtung.org' (Election-Watch.EU) has developed a classroom module for the election-related socialisation of young students. It has been adapted for the European Parliament elections and linked to young voters' exposure to candidates in a plenary discussion. It has since been developed into a project for young voters in an EU-accession candidate country, Albania. Building on these experiences, Austrian civil society continues to advocate for youth inclusion in the electoral process in a non-partisan manner as electoral reforms continue.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ Demand for citizenship education for young and first-time voters.
- ▶ Practical exercises and workshops on electoral reforms.
- ▶ Existing youth engagement activities that can be associated with the initiative.
- ▶ A pool of engaged individuals (for example CSO leaders, teachers, interested supporters on the side of donors, international organisations or the media).

- ▶ The ability to identify opportunities, adapt methodologies and invent new approaches.
- ▶ Flexibility and adaptability in delivery (for example, during COVID-19 measures).
- ▶ Communication and information exchange between youth and policy makers.
- ▶ Public outreach, with proposals for building a larger audience.
- ▶ A voting age that helps integrate young and first-time voters in citizenship education (16 in Austria).

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

### Engaging youth in the electoral process

It started with an individual initiative, when Election-Watch.EU began to comment publicly on electoral reforms from a non-partisan and independent civil society perspective. This followed the 2016 electoral crisis in Austria, where the presidential run-off had to be completely rerun. Working with a committed high school teacher, Election-Watch.EU developed a classroom module for educating young and first-time voters on democratic principles and electoral practices. Subsequently, Election-Watch.EU piloted and rolled out a workshop for this age group entitled 'Electoral Systems and the Understanding of Democracy'.

This five-hour, practice-oriented, interactive module was accessible to all students in vocational and higher training schools in Burgenland province. In the workshop, facilitators shared their own international election observation experience, while students learned about the foundations of democracy and the role of elections from a comparative perspective. Using ballot simulation exercises, participants could experience various electoral systems from around the world and compare them to Austria. Importantly, the workshop was created jointly by students, teachers and experts, contributing to its success. The Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres awarded the 2018 Barbara Prammer Prize to Election-Watch.EU for "Outstanding work and initiatives in the field of civic education" at the national parliament.

### Stepping up youth engagement for elections to the European Parliament

Election-Watch.EU continued to offer citizenship education to young and first-time voters in the public education system ahead of the May 2019 European Parliament elections. As part of European Youth Week and through a Memorandum of Understanding on voter education with the European Parliament, Election-Watch.EU's workshop format was adapted to raise awareness of European electoral processes and the European Parliament's electoral system.

Students from five different schools across Austria prepared questions for a panel discussion with leading candidates from all political parties. Over 150 young students and trainees took part. In a lively discussion, candidates answered questions on the environment, migration and legislative developments, providing an overview of policy options on offer at the ballot. It also helped broaden



Examples of youth voter information materials produced at the workshop in Albania, March 2021

students' knowledge of the EU and increase their motivation to vote in the European elections.<sup>3</sup>

Following the event, short motivational and informational videos directed at young voters were disseminated via social media, to amplify the impact of the event among youth prior to election day. Subsequently, Election-Watch.EU was invited to present its work with young and first-time voters in Austria at the Elections Night for European Parliament partner organisations in Brussels.

### Expanding activities to the European neighbourhood: Albania

Building on these experiences and advocating for electoral reforms from a civil society perspective at European level, Election-Watch.EU developed a project for young and first-time voters in an EU accession candidate country, Albania, in 2020-21 in partnership with the Albanian Young Professionals Network (YPN) and with funding by the Robert Bosch Foundation.

Due to political disputes and compromises, electoral reform was underway in Albania related to the process of EU accession. However, civic space has been shrinking in recent years. Young voters are often not fully aware of the ongoing reforms and their opportunities to contribute. This highlighted the need for enhanced civic education and motivation ahead of the April 2021 Albanian parliamentary elections.

The heart of the project was the 'Active Youth in the Electoral Process' workshop, dedicated to improving the knowledge and skills of

a generation of young Albanian voters, helping them engage with elections in a non-partisan manner. It included learning modules from the Austrian module, touching on the electoral cycle, electoral stakeholders and international standards. There were also new materials on European electoral values and Albania's EU integration, with inputs from international organisations and the Albanian Central Elections Commission. Following three online preparatory sessions, the participants met face-to-face in the Albanian countryside, where they learned about their own electoral system in detail and developed content to contribute to voter education via social media. The youth were also encouraged to launch follow-up activities to disseminate the workshop findings to a larger audience.<sup>4</sup> According to the project website, posts reached more than 10,000 people.

The overwhelming majority of participants stated that the workshop experience will prove useful in future. In the project's external evaluation, the evaluator concluded that "the rule of law has become more important for the participants". This was seen as a significant outcome, given the drop in public trust in the Albanian electoral process and the small role for youth engagement in it.

A survey of workshop participants on their subsequent election-related engagement showed that the experience had increased their motivation to become active citizens. On election day, 13 of 19 participants engaged in roles other than voters. Seven were technical operators in the election administration, six were election observers and 10 participants took part in follow-up projects, including voter education videos, OpEds and research on elections and COVID-19 and a social media monitoring pilot project.

### **Ongoing advocacy for electoral reforms and youth engagement in Austria**

Election-Watch.EU continues its advocacy for electoral reforms and non-partisan youth engagement, including at the Austrian Parliament. A study among poll workers conducted jointly with the Vienna Center for Electoral Research<sup>5</sup> found that one measure for improving youth engagement in the electoral process could be to make them part of the election day administration, linking this to the civic and voter education activities described above. In Austria, polling station committee members are nominated by the political parties, similarly to other EU Member States. However, parties are facing recruitment problems, casting doubts on the sustainability of the approach. By including non-partisan young and first-time vot-

ers on polling station committees, it could both bridge this gap and provide citizenship education opportunities.

The underlying hypothesis is that if voters engage in elections at an early stage as polling station committee members, it enhances their socialisation in democratic participation and their potential for constructive contribution to future functioning democracy. This would involve creating a pool of poll workers that included youth. When the Austrian government tabled electoral reforms for 2023, this idea was adopted. Election-Watch.EU continues to advocate for youth inclusion while these reforms are ongoing.

## **ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER**

Election-Watch.EU ([wahlbeobachtung.org](http://wahlbeobachtung.org)) is an independent, non-partisan civil society organisation with extended international and citizen-based election observation and electoral assistance expertise. The initiative aims at observing and assessing the European Elections and electoral processes in European countries. The process initiated in Austria focuses on international obligations and commitments as well as on best practices to strengthen democracy in Europe and European fundamental values.

Through recommendations and advocacy, Election-Watch.EU contributes to the improvement of EU and EU member states' electoral systems and processes, and more broadly to the strengthening of democratic political practice. Election-Watch.EU provides information on the European and Austrian election processes, international standards and best practices.

### **Contacts:**

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**Cover photo:** Workshop with a group of first-time voters at a high school in Eisenstadt, May 2019

<sup>1</sup> For example Kritzinger and Zeglovits 2015; Faas and Leininger 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Meeting with Demokratiewerkstatt at the Austrian Parliament, July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Video from the event: <https://www.facebook.com/wahlbeobachtung.org/videos/398425117667678>

<sup>4</sup> Video from the workshop: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=282514773457524&ref=sharing>

<sup>5</sup> Electoral Studies 77, June 2022.



**#24**



**GHANA**

**YOUTH LEADERSHIP  
PARLIAMENT: MAKE  
GHANA GREAT AGAIN**

## ABSTRACT

Among Ghana's population of 30.8 million, approximately 57% are under the age of 25, according to the Ghana Statistical Service data for 2020. This proportion has been increasing year-on-year over the last three decades. If the country seeks to build its human capital, it is imperative to have policies and programmes targeted at training and nurturing these young people to build and maintain its democracy and governance.

The Youth Leadership Parliament (YLP) initiative is aimed at developing the next generation of national leaders. It seeks to foster relations with the older generation, in particular by allowing the emerging leaders to learn from the first-hand experience of incumbent political figures. It will provide them with opportunities to share their stories and those of their communities, implement projects, hold town hall meetings and build bridges for conflict resolution.

## ENABLING FACTORS

- ▶ Ghana's legal framework makes it easy to establish initiatives that can give a voice to the voiceless in society and provide youth with an environment that enables them to share their thoughts and concerns on current affairs issues. The National Youth Policy 2022-2032 and the National Youth Authority Act of 2016 allow for the setting up of a youth engagement initiative to train young people and provide them with the right skills and opportunities. Other policy instruments, such as the National Youth Charter and Policy 2010 or the First Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace – Youth-GPS

2016-2020, have an established dynamic of constructive cooperation between the state institutions and youth groups.

- ▶ The Youth Leadership Parliament (YLP) initiative benefitted from the support of mainstream political leaders, heads of state agencies and the private sector. YLP's official launch on 30 March 2016, for example, saw the participation of leaders of the Youth Wings of all the major Political Parties, as well as directors of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and high-profile political figures.<sup>1</sup>

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The YLP initiative operates as a leadership hub designed to boost the skills and capabilities of young leaders who are passionate and interested in democracy, politics, leadership and governance. They learn the key principles of leadership and how it should translate into strengthening the country's political institutions. It focuses on where they can make a difference, the problems they can solve and the positive impact they can make to people's lives and in society as a whole.

The appeal of the YLP initiative is based on its key elements: career guidance, certification, leadership skill training, networking and exposure to the political sphere and public opinion. Its debates are broadcast on national television, radio, tabloids, and social media (WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube), which feature the policy ideas, projects and parliamentary debates of the thousands of young people who have joined the initiative.

## KEY OUTCOMES

### Alumni network

The YLP initiative has built up the confidence of thousands of young people across the country. Graduates of the YLP can be found in every sector of Ghana's political system. Some have been able to run for positions in their various political parties, won elections and became Presidents of the Student Representative Council in their universities and tertiary schools across the country. Others even won elections to become President of the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS).

### Sustained policy engagement

The initiative offers young leaders a permanent platform for sustained engagement and advocacy on youth issues. This covers the national level – with the National Youth Authority (who, in 2016, had already awarded YLP the legal mandate to operate in Ghana) – and the international level, within the framework of global policy initiatives such as the United Nations Youth Summit in 2019 or Youth Democracy Cohort of the Summit for Democracy.

### Awareness raising

The YLP initiative has empowered its members to spread the word of its achievements in their schools, communities and societies via

outreach campaigns in universities, market squares, music festivals, flyers and banners. This is creating awareness on the importance of youth political participation for the health of the democratic system.

### Visibility

Since its inception, the founder of this initiative has been successful in gaining access to traditional media, namely TV Africa, Joy Prime and Ghone EIB Network. It has weekly broadcasts, interview sessions, breakfast shows, mid-morning shows and invitations to participate in TV political programme activities. This access has been the biggest tool of our success; we push our initiative through these channels.

### Countering polarisation

The YLP initiative is characterised by ethnic diversity and includes representatives from all the 16 regions, nine major tribes and 100 sub-tribes in Ghana. This has allowed it to contribute to countering polarisation and mitigating the adverse impact of partisan politics. Here, however, the YLP has had to tread carefully to avoid being co-opted by political parties or discredited through false rumours and fake news, but is currently perceived as being above partisan politics.

### Bridging the generational divide

In a similar vein, the initiative has had to overcome a perceived conflict with the older generation of leaders, who understandably felt threatened and insecure. By involving them in its activities, the YLP made them friends rather than foes, as well as making them aware that young people make up the majority of the electorate and that youth empowerment is crucial for the future of Ghana.

## ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTER

Youth Leadership Parliament is an initiative with a vision to raise a new generation of young African leaders for good governance and sustainable democracy. The organisation is established as a Model Parliament, a platform to give opportunities to aspiring young leaders across the African continent for leadership mentoring, capacity building and to have a voice to engage governments on alternative policy ideas and participate in decision making on issues that affect the future of young people.

All Africans between the ages of 15-40 are eligible to join the Parliament. There is currently a wide membership of student leaders across the African continent, who are engaging in various advocacy programmes and community intervention projects for transformation and development.

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<sup>1</sup> These include the former General Secretary of the New patriotic Party (Ruling Party) also the former Forestry Commission Chief Executive, Mr Kwadwo Owusu Afriyie (Sir John), Presidential aspirant for the Convention People Party, Mr Ivor Greenstreet esq., an independent Presidential Candidate, Maverick Kofi Gane, Former Member of Parliament for Ledzokuku constituency and current National Health Insurance Scheme Chief Executive, Bernard Okoe-Boye.







Innovation, competence, and appetite for change.  
We need youth as the driving force in the  
democratic progress to fully employ  
these qualities in our effort for  
a just and prosperous society.

Case studies gathered through the  
Youth Democracy Cohort illustrate  
how young people changed their societies  
and what enabling factors led to their success.  
They offer good practice for governments as well  
as activists who seek to benefit from the creative genius of youth.

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