



THE **POWER**
OF DIALOGUE
CONSORTIUM

The **voice** of **youth** at the table

Lessons learned from amplifying youth voices for inclusive democracies by the Power of Dialogue Consortium in Burkina Faso, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Tunisia, and Uganda.

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GLOSSARY

AMWA	Akina Mama wa Afrika
CEMI	Centre for Mediterranean and International Studies
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DFID	Department for International Development
GORIN	Goree Institute
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and others
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIMD	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
PoD	Power of Dialogue
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

OUR SUMMARY

Amplifying youth's voice at the table and enabling youth to play a meaningful role in politics is essential for establishing robust and inclusive democracies.

With the global youth population at an all-time high and young people spearheading political movements worldwide, their participation is more crucial than ever. At the same time, young people are frequently excluded and disregarded from decision-making, leading to feelings of disregard and alienation. Young people must not only have a seat at the table, but their voices should be listened to and engaged in collaborative dialogue. Only then can we bridge the gap between young people and decision-makers.

The Power of Dialogue (PoD) partners firmly believe that young people want to be involved in politics and can **contribute positively to inclusive democracy**, but they need to be supported and provided with the right opportunities. To support this effort, PoD partners have implemented several initiatives to promote youth participation in politics.

This publication utilizes PoD interventions as an example to study global trends and best practices for amplifying youth political participation. It is a synthesis of seven case studies from six countries and offers a global perspective on youth political participation.

We aim to raise interest in this topic and provide the necessary knowledge on the gaps, challenges, opportunities, and ideas for strengthening youth participation in political processes. From Burkina Faso to Colombia, the PoD partners have made a significant impact and created opportunities for youth to engage in political processes differently. The findings can inform those aspiring to work on youth political participation.

Through our work, we have identified five key challenges for working on youth political participation, including:

- Youth are underrepresented in political institutions and decision-making bodies, including political parties, while the necessary **commitment from political leadership** is frequently limited.
- Young people are among the most **vulnerable** groups in society and growing socio-economic inequalities in many countries have exacerbated their challenges.
- There needs to be more **implementation** of existing legislation, mechanisms, and policies to support youth political participation.
- The **high cost of politics** is a significant concern for young people in many countries, and low economic position is one of the main barriers for youth in each of our case studies.
- Youth exclusion is often the **result of various factors** that reinforce each other.

But how can we develop and implement programmes for youth that consider these challenges?

The PoD partners have achieved remarkable results through a variety of interventions - including targeted democracy education for youth leaders, dialogue facilitation, and civic engagement platforms. The importance of young people in politics is increasingly recognized and more young people are becoming politically engaged. We have identified several best practices in working on political participation of young people:



- Young people are a diverse and heterogeneous group. Amplifying young people in politics requires different approaches to different groups of young people and an intersectional perspective. Recognizing the **diversity of young people** through responding to their diverse needs and **inclusion** measures is essential for meaningful and inclusive political participation.
- Building **partnerships** with local (youth-) actors is essential for youth political participation. Collaborations contribute to the impact and sustainability.
- **Network-building** has a multiplier impact on youth participation, as well as the training of trainers. This reinforces peer-to-peer learning and spreads participation beyond those participating in interventions.
- Young people are best to ask what they need. Young people need to be **included in the design and implementation** of intervention preferably from beginning to end - thus creating ownership and building the confidence of young people.
- Building bridges between young people and current political leadership is at the core of our work, but it is important also to **create safe spaces for young people**.
- Young people are a dynamic target group, with their realities changing daily, especially due to the shrinking democratic space. **Adaptivity** within youth programmes enables us to respond to those realities.
- Young people participate differently in politics, as they are more active in informal participation and have different ways of communicating. Amplifying young people requires an **innovative perspective** to approach and deliver programmes.

CONCLUSION

A shift in mindset is required from all involved actors to create the new generation of political leaders. Youth participation needs to go hand in hand with adaptivity and innovative programming, co-creation of programmes, advocating for implementation for youth legislation and youth inclusion mechanisms, commitment from political leadership and an integrative lens to the broad exclusion of youth and its connection to security and economic development.

Join us as we explore the importance of youth participation in politics, the current challenges, and how we can better include the voices of youth at the table to build inclusive and strong democracies.

COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

Burkina Faso

Paradox of youth engagement

NIMD in Burkina Faso witnessed a new form of political engagement among the youth. Since the coup d'état in 2022, many young people who were previously not politically committed find themselves now actively supporting the transitional (military-led) government. This apparent rejection of electoral democracy can be explained by the dissatisfaction of the country's socio-economic development and the association of the political system with bad governance and corruption. The political system itself is now instead perceived as an obstacle. This is what makes young people distrust the practice of a democratic political system, even if democratic values are not necessarily rejected. NIMD addresses the distrust and dissatisfaction with political cafés, dialogues and Democracy Schools to keep young people engaged, informed and continue trust-building.

Colombia

Addressing the adult-centrism bias in public institutions

Public institutions often prioritize the needs, perspectives, and interests of adult citizens over young people. This contributes significantly to the limited political engagement of young people in politics in Colombia. Another challenge is the homogenization of young people as a group, although the diversity and related diverse (political) needs are high. Both trends result in limited attention to issues pertinent to young people. To address this issue, NIMD facilitates dialogues on multiple levels to open up spaces for issues affecting young people and trust and supports the development of new solutions from young people for more inclusive decision-making.

El Salvador

Co-creation with young people

In NIMD's programme in El Salvador, the motto is: practice what you preach. The young people in NIMD El Salvador's activities were actively invited to provide their input on the country programme. They became co-managers in implementation by defining priority topics and delivery methodologies - strengthening the youth's individual and collective self-esteem. Young people thereby took on a proactive approach, demonstrating an understanding of and appreciation for their role, exposing them to future leadership roles.

COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS

Guatemala

Amplifying youth voices in their own communities

Understanding and adapting to the local context is important in NIMD Guatemala's work, as we support youth in their own communities. For example, the long-standing programme Youth +D trains young people on a municipal level, involving them in strengthening collective and grassroots organizations in their local communities through a dialogue approach with municipality representatives. Local advocacy and solutions for youth underscores the direct impact on the community.

Tunisia

New digital platform to engage youth

CEMI's programme Fresh is an alternative media channel and an open space for non-engaged youth to express their opinions and discuss how they see the future of their country. The platform brings together different views and opinions and creates a safe space. This programme embodies years of reflection on the national context and the youth's response to it, seeking to better address their needs and engage them effectively. The programme hereby aims to support new language and initiatives to facilitate innovative forms of youth participation.

Uganda

Superficial mechanisms of youth participation

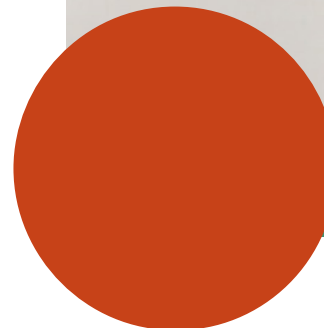
Uganda has youth political structures in place on multiple levels. However, like in many other contexts, these structures have been captured and instrumentalized by political patronage, making them superficial and tokenistic. Poverty, high levels of unemployment, monetized and militarized politics, and shrinking democratic space, continue to hinder effectiveness of meaningful and inclusive youth participation. To address the superficial mechanisms, NIMD and AMWA are facilitating policy dialogue spaces, building capacity of youth leaders and building bridges between generations to stimulate the voices of Ugandan young people.

INTRODUCTION TO THE **POWER OF DIALOGUE** CONSORTIUM

Youth political participation is crucial for inclusive democracy and, therefore, one of the priorities of the Power of Dialogue (PoD) Consortium, a global partnership of civil society organizations worldwide. This publication utilizes the PoD Consortium as an example to study global trends and best practices for supporting youth political participation.

This publication combines seven case studies from six countries, namely Burkina Faso, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Tunisia and Uganda.

The publication provides a global perspective on youth political participation, informs internal learning for the PoD partners at the mid-term point and showcases the PoD partners work on youth political participation. The PoD Consortium is a five-year programme (2021-2025) implemented by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), the Gorée Institute (GORIN), the Centre for Mediterranean and International Studies (CEMI) and Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA). The programme is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. It focuses on the following countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Mozambique, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq, Guatemala, Colombia and Myanmar. This publication is based on case studies from NIMD (Burkina Faso, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Uganda), CEMI (Tunisia) and AMwA (Uganda).





The PoD partners support women, youth, and other marginalized groups to influence and participate in political processes effectively.

In particular, youth are placed at the heart of activities and regarded as cross-cutting. Young people are supported by enabling them to harness relevant knowledge and networks for their participation endeavors, facilitating dialogue and ensuring their voices are included in policy-making. PoD partners encourage political and civic actors, especially political parties, to create an enabling environment for young people in politics. From the outset of the programme, PoD partners sought to promote participation, by focusing on the political system, political actors, and political culture.

Governments and other entities worldwide are making remarkable efforts to advance youth participation in politics. The PoD consortium is an example of such an entity that has been implementing programmes to bolster youth engagement in politics, and significant steps have been taken.



INTRODUCTION

YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Governments, international organizations, and researchers are increasingly recognizing the necessity and significance of youth political participation. With a [quarter of the global population, about 1.8 billion people, between the ages 15 and 35](#), the world has the largest generation of young people it has ever seen. This presents immense potential for progress - with each young person comes new ideas and new energy. The world's youth are arguably vital to fostering strong democracies, but often remain an untapped resource.

Harnessing youth capabilities in democracy can force systems to change for the better and usher in a new dawn.

“When young people are shut out of the decisions being made about their lives ... we all lose. It's not enough to listen to young people — we need to integrate them into decision-making mechanisms at the local, national and international levels.”
United Nations Secretary General António Guterres in a [message](#) on International Youth Day 12 August 2022.

The United Nations (UN) is making strides in promoting youth participation - participation in decision-making being a key priority area of the UN agenda on youth. The UN believes that young people are an important resource for development and key agents for change and progress. Over the years, the UN has opposed the false narrative that young people are a problem. They have been serious about strengthening youth voices and ensuring young people's full participation and inclusion. The [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 Youth, Peace and Security](#) recognizes youth's positive contribution to peace - youth are a unique resource that can develop innovative solutions for peace and development. Political participation is recognized as one of its five pillars for inclusive peace and prosperity.

Simultaneously, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the [Youth @ Heart strategy](#), recognizing the important role of young people in their development policies and mainstreaming meaningful youth participation throughout their foreign policy.

The European Commission recently launched [EU Youth Action Plan 2022 - 2027](#), prioritizing youth participation. While the African Union is prioritizing youth engagement in the 37th African Union Summit based on their ambitions in the [Agenda 2063](#) and the establishment of [Youth Reference Committee](#). The latter of which to emphasize the crucial role of young people in high-level decision-making.

These commitments are just a few examples of the initiatives where recognition for the pivotal role of youth is continuously growing among multilateral institutions and governments.

However, the political integration of young people continues to be a challenge in many parts of the world.

It is challenging for youth to participate in policymaking and have a say in decisions that affect their lives as they are often sidelined and excluded from participation in politics. Yet young people have much to offer if they are able to step up, participate, and take on leadership roles. In the long term, the best guarantee of any democracy is citizen participation - especially youth participation. What is required is political will, a mindset shift, and commitment from governments and other actors, including politicians and political parties, civil society, development organizations, the private sector, and media actors.

Significant efforts have been made to bolster youth participation in politics with several noteworthy achievements documented worldwide, [including Nigeria, Bangladesh, Moldova, and Jordan](#). These accomplishments ought to serve as inspiration for others globally. However, persistent challenges underscore the importance of ongoing efforts to encourage countries to establish an enabling environment for youth involvement in politics.



SETTING THE STAGE FOR YOUTH VOICES

Before we embark on a journey to explore our documented experiences from around the world, it is crucial to set the stage – and understand the role of youth voices in democracy. We shall begin by defining youth political participation as a concept. Next, we dive into the significance of youth political participation for fostering sustainable democracies and young people’s contribution to democratic development. Through practitioners’ experiences and research, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth political participation.

Defining Youth Political Participation

Although there is no absolute consensus about the concept of ‘youth,’ there are some important definitions. The [United Nations](#) defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 24, while the [African Union Youth Charter](#) recognizes people between 15 and 35 years as young. Youth can also be recognized as a phase in life where individuals consolidate their moral, social, cultural, economic and physical autonomy rather than solely a period limited to determined age boundaries. Youth definitions are also dependent on the country contexts.

Political participation is about having the means and opportunity to influence decision-making and engaging in actions to contribute to building a better society. There is sufficient evidence from around the world to argue that young people have asserted their role, influence and importance in governance by championing political causes. Youth political participation refers to the involvement of young people in political activities, civic life, active citizenship, and policy making.



Youth political participation must also be looked at beyond formal participation and conventional approaches. Youth political participation has [diverse forms](#). It can be formal – including activities such as voting on an election, becoming members of political parties, contesting as a candidate; or informal through serving on a local youth council, being part of a youth organization or taking part in online political activism, boycotts, volunteering or a protest movement. Effective and meaningful youth political participation takes several attributes: assignment of young people – where youth are informed and assigned but without decision-making power, consultation of young people – hearing young people’s voices, adult-initiated participation of young people – where adults share decisions with youth, youth-led participation – where young people have a direct impact on decision making through youth-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs), student councils and other formations, or collaborative participation – where young people take part in regular political decision-making processes and share decision-making with adults. Non-participation can be characterized by [decoration, tokenism or manipulation](#), where young people are being exploited, used or harmed.



We consider youth political participation a broad concept. Youth political participation demands an approach that includes formal participation but also extends to informal participation - recognizing the involvement of young people in decision-making processes on multiple levels and in different political spaces. Youth political participation should also go beyond descriptive participation, by emphasizing meaningful participation. **Young people should have a seat at the table, but also be able to meaningfully engage and have an integrated voice in the decision-making process.**

Why is the political participation of youth essential?

Young people are critical for strong and inclusive democracies – young people’s active contributions can bring democratic values to life. According to the [Global Youth Development Index](#), many countries are experiencing a “youth bulge” - a surge in the youth population. A trend that holds the promise of a “[demographic dividend](#)” as young people contribute to economic growth and well-being. At the same time, youth are largely excluded from political decision-making processes and rarely represented in parliament or decision-making bodies, [crucial for the demographic dividend to materialize](#). Young people under 30 make up less than 2% of the members of parliament worldwide. This, despite the fact that the policies and laws being adopted will profoundly **impact their present and future**. The underrepresentation of young people hampers their ability to influence decision-making processes that influence their own lives and perpetuates the necessity for a broader range of perspectives and new ideas in governance.

As active citizens, [young people have the right to participate](#), have a voice, advocate and lobby for their rights and needs¹ Moreover, the participation of youth in politics is vital for a democracy to be **inclusive and representative**. Akina Mama wa Africa (AMwA) argues that in Uganda youth underrepresentation in politics undermines democracy and the representativeness of political parties in society.

The cornerstone of democratic governance is inclusive participation in political processes, which includes meaningful involvement of young men and women. As they state, “inclusive participation determines the dynamics of the structure and distribution of political power and the consequent nature of political and economic institutions that shape the political and economic trajectory of the society.”

According to [a study by AfroBarometer in 2021](#), when youth cannot achieve more significant involvement in politics and are excluded from decision-making, they are likely to feel disenfranchised and seek other avenues for political change other than formal political institutions. The exclusion of young people can have **negative societal consequences** – threatening political stability, economic development, and social cohesion. Youth want to participate in politics, but they face significant obstacles to do so in their countries. **The burden of these negative consequences lies not with young people, rather with their [systematic exclusion](#) and [dissatisfaction of the practice and promises from democracy](#).**

We recognize the importance of youth participation for inclusive democracy. Young people are not apathetic; youth are passionate and interested in politics and political action but lack support and opportunities and risk becoming [alienated from politics](#). Youth exclusion from political processes undermines youth’s rightful citizenship – full participation – inclusive democratic decision-making processes and representativeness of democracy.



Youth’s contribution to democracy

Youth participation is the solution. With the global population of youth at an all-time high and widespread shrinking democratic space, this is the consensus of the countries worldwide as they search for new solutions to the problems in the world.

The obstacles young people face to participate in politics are context-dependent. The obstacles for youth participation per country will be showcased through our case studies later on. In general, however, young people experience society-broad obstacles such as a low socio-economic position (e.g. youth unemployment) and socio-cultural barriers such as stereotypes, cultural norms, and discrimination of youth. The exclusive political culture, and informal political norms, patronage, distrust between generations (inside and outside of politics), security challenges for political engagement,

and a lack of opportunities for participation create a discouraging environment for young people to step into politics.

Youth political participation has continued to attract considerable attention in different spheres. Decision making is more sustainable when people of various ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and genders are involved. Participation policies and mechanisms aimed at facilitating the involvement of those facing difficulty participating – such as those hindered by poverty, limited education, cultural practices, language barriers, discrimination, age and race— cannot achieve success unless they actively engage young people. Young people are among the underrepresented groups regarding social inclusion.

The [Department for International Development](#) (DFID) has found a significant difference between young people who have received services and those who have taken an active role in political engagement to help their own development and that of their community. The latter group has consistently had a more profound impact.

Youth political participation has an intrinsic link with democracy and good governance, [as shown in Nigeria](#). Not only is there a link, but – to foster good governance, it is crucial to enhance the involvement of youth in politics. This effort will not only improve transparency and accountability of the system but will also foster economic and political development.

But – to make progress, we need to change our mindset. Youth programmes are necessary to create socio-political awareness, give young people a sense of responsibility, and better understand

themselves. When youth are informed, they are more likely to become involved.

As practitioners, we see young people’s contribution to democracy every day in our work. **Apart from increased democratic representation, better and more sustainable policies are being developed, and decisions are made with more inclusive voices at the table.** As youth populations are rising worldwide working on youth political participation is even more relevant. Effective youth participation in politics allows democracies to be more inclusive and, in turn, more sustainable.

It is crucial to engage young decision-makers of tomorrow in today’s decisions – young people are the future of their country’s development.

¹ Participation is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

² AMwA, Advancing Gender Transformative Youth Political Participation in Uganda (2023), as part of ‘The Voice of Youth at the Table.’

OUR CASE **STUDIES**

Youth have demonstrated important contributions to democracy. However, youth need to be given more support and opportunities to meaningfully fulfill this engagement. Those supporting youth should seek to enhance their understanding of youth engagement in politics worldwide. Furthermore, there is a need for more evidence regarding which interventions or activities are most effective in addressing or reducing these barriers.

In response, we have explored seven extensive case studies to better understand the context and barriers youth face in each country. The case studies showcase examples of each country's interventions and best practices, from Burkina Faso, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Tunisia, and Uganda. The latter is based on two highlighted case studies.

The results of these seven country case studies are summarized below. They present historical, political, and socio-economic context of each country and highlight our interventions in the countries on youth political participation.

Country highlight Burkina Faso

Paradox of youth engagement

NIMD in Burkina Faso witnessed a new form of political participation among the youth. Since the coup d'état in 2022, many young people who were previously not politically committed find themselves now actively supporting the transitional (military-led) government and are overtly critical of the state of democracy in their country. This apparent rejection of electoral democracy can be explained by the fact that in the past thirty years since formally adopting a democratic system, the country's progress and socio-economic development is unsatisfactory. The political system itself is now instead perceived as an obstacle, whereby many young people believe their political system encourages bad governance and facilitates corruption. This is what makes young people distrust the democratic political system, even if democratic values are not necessarily rejected.

Burkina Faso

Country trends in youth political participation

Approximately 60% of the Burkina Faso [population is under 25](#), with that figure projected to rise significantly by 2025. In Burkina Faso, the youth have constitutional right to contest, vote and participate in politics. However, there remains an under-representation of youth in politics. For example, after the 2020 elections, only 11% of members of parliament were under 40. Some of the barriers to youth participation in politics include low levels of trust in politics and political actors, discrimination of youth in political parties, lack of political career plans for young people within political parties, social-cultural constraints that silence youth (especially young women), regressive political culture, and low levels of economic empowerment. There are several government initiatives for young people's political participation, including commitments made at the international level and actions taken at the national level.

Young people in Burkina Faso have notably been engaged in informal political participation – they have been at the forefront of meetings, demonstrations, and election campaigns. For example, in 2014, Burkina Faso's youth took to the streets to protest the former-leader's plan to extend their rule. In 2015, young people resisted the coup d'état attempt. After the 30 September 2022 coup d'état, Captain Ibrahim Traore was sworn in as the leader of the transitional government, who has garnered significant support among young people.

Political parties-initiated programmes have made significant moves to build young people's capacity and participation in the party structures. Unfortunately, these programmes have been suspended since the coup d'état in 2022. The exclusion from political participation is perceived as a significant factor driving young people's favourable attitude towards the current transitional government. Many young individuals see the transitional government as a chance to rebuild the state and initiate development initiatives.

Example of interventions

NIMD Burkina Faso is working to support young people by providing them with knowledge, skills, and networks that can help them play an active role in the country's political life. Firstly, NIMD Burkina Faso, in partnership with Anndal Institute, ran Universités Démocratiques et Populaires for youth in politics and civil society and Ecoles Politiques for youth in political parties. Secondly, in collaboration with the Anndal Institute, it is focusing solely on political youth. Additionally, NIMD Burkina Faso is facilitating exchanges between young people and political actors, through Political Cafés at local and regional levels, to strengthen collaboration and mutual learning. The main objective is to provide young people with democratic education and address their lack of training opportunities. The support to the Burkina Faso Coalition for the Defence of Women's Rights has prepared young women and girls for careers in politics and civil society by encouraging and enabling their commitment to being agents of change through the training and continuous engagement and connections with other activities afterwards.

NIMD Burkina Faso's initiatives have helped tackle barriers and improve political participation of Burkina's youth. There are indications that political actors are now beginning to promote young executives. NIMD Burkina Faso's work has also helped to start lowering the social barriers that prevent young girls from taking part in politics.



Country highlight Colombia

Adult-centric public institutions

Public institutions often prioritize the needs, perspectives, and interests of adult citizens over young people. This contributes significantly to the limited political engagement of young people in politics in Colombia. Another challenge is the homogenization of young people as a group, although the diversity and related diverse (political) needs are high. Both trends result in limited attention to issues pertinent to young people. To address this issue, it is necessary to implement institutional reforms and invest in inter-generational trust-building.



Colombia

Country trends in youth political participation

26% of Colombia's population are young people between 14 and 28. In this demographic reality, the youth hold an enormous potential for creating change. The recent government's National Development Plan 2022-2026 focuses among others on youth exclusion and a new social contract, as a recognition of this potential. Unfortunately, youth remain underrepresented in politics and decision-making in Colombia.

Some of the factors hindering youth political participation in Colombia include the dominance of an adult-centric perspective within public institutions. Adults are often regarded as possessing greater value, visibility, and control within society, including within public institutions, which can marginalize the voices and contributions of youth. To build on that, young people have been categorized and homogenized, making their differentiated and diverse agendas invisible. Moreover, structural violence constitutes a barrier for youth in Colombia – structural violence, primarily perpetuated by powerful entities, functions as a mechanism of repression and imposition of a single standardized order. Structural violence in Colombia is manifested through intimidating practices carried out by armed groups and the involvement of young people in the conflict. In addition, young people's comprehensive development in Colombia is faced by deprived access to economic opportunities and high numbers of youth unemployment. Systemic barriers to youth entrepreneurship make such initiatives scarce and unsuccessful, hindering youth's development.

In Colombia, youth political participation primarily takes the form of informal engagement, such as participating in protests and demonstrations. Youth in Colombia use public spaces as a platform for expressing and claiming expanded freedom and participation in decision-making spaces. Over the past six years, several examples of youth political activism have emerged, including student protests against cuts to education funding in 2018, a nationwide strike against corruption in 2019, and another strike against restrictive measures in the relation to COVID-19 in 2021.



Example of interventions

NIMD Colombia has developed and executed different actions around opening spaces for citizen participation, training and knowledge qualification processes, and spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogues, applying public innovation methodologies, and incorporating differential approaches such as gender and youth perspectives across different sectors. Interventions like the Democracy School, multi-stakeholder dialogues such as Territorial Dialogue Initiatives, and deliberative democracy methodology in the 'Minipublic' have yielded positive and tangible results. Multi-stakeholder dialogues have helped open spaces for discussions on issues affecting young people. Similarly, Minipublic engages young people through deliberative democracy through dialogues on sub-national and national levels to establish 30 proposals for youth participation. This intervention is valued for its comprehensive approach, which includes modules led by thematic experts prior to dialogues and proposal development, mentoring support, networking opportunities during dialogues, and the creation of platforms with educational content. These efforts have successfully brought together diverse leaders to enhance their knowledge and embrace new, innovative approaches to leadership.

Country highlight El Salvador

Co-creation with young people

In NIMD's programme in El Salvador, the motto is: practice what you preach. The young people in NIMD El Salvador's activities were actively invited to provide their input on the country programme. They became co-managers in implementation by defining priority topics and delivery methodologies - strengthening the youth's individual and collective self-esteem. Young people thereby took on a proactive approach, demonstrating an understanding of and appreciation for their role, exposing them to future leadership roles.



El Salvador

Country trends in youth political participation

Democracy is under threat in El Salvador. The country is struggling with institutional weakening and the breakdown of rule of law while dealing with the costs of serious human rights violations related to tackling organized crime. Youth seeking to participate in politics find the space increasingly constricted.

Over the years, efforts have been made to create spaces for youth participation. This led to young people's engagements in political participation - including joining political parties, participating in protests and demonstrations, and running for political office. Young people are also getting involved in politics through participation in local governance structures such as youth councils. However, since 2019, these efforts have encountered setbacks due to legal obstacles concerning the registration of youth organizations and the breakdown of an institutional framework for youth, the 'Instituto Nacional de Juventud'.

Generally, El Salvador continues to grapple with challenges including maintaining the few spaces of democratic representation, safeguarding civic space and the struggle for human rights. More specifically, participation of youth in politics is extremely low. Although 18 years is the voting age in El Salvador, voter turnout has been markedly low among youth.

Despite previous elections in El Salvador witnessing a surge in young people's interest in democratic engagement at local and national levels, the 2021 election saw the lowest voter turnout among individuals under 30 years of age on record. Challenges to youth political participation in El Salvador encompass feelings of exclusion from political processes, a lack of perceived capability for change, limited access to political education and leadership development programmes. Thereby constraining their effective engagement in political process. Although young people and women are elected, the interests and solutions to the main problems affecting these populations are still absent from the public debate.

Other barriers to youth political participation include human rights violations, especially police and military brutality. Since 2022, the State of Emergency has been in effect, under which community leaders and human rights defenders have been detained without due process. There are cases of police and military harassment, including harassment of youth engaged in democracy work. State restrictions on registrations of youth organizations have affected young people's activities.

Example of interventions

Youth political participation is vital for sustainable progress and building a strong democracy. That is why NIMD El Salvador, implements projects to address barriers to youth empowerment, participation and advocacy. For example, NIMD El Salvador has partnered with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to equipped young people with skills, knowledge and networks essential for participation in the democratic processes and facilitated dialogue processes in local decision-making processes. Over 200 young people were trained in the municipalities of Jiquilisco and Tecoluca areas, which are areas with high levels of social conflict and insecurity and unfavorable conditions for youth participation. However, they were able to form advocacy groups to promote meaningful youth participation. Also, over 40 young people have been equipped with knowledge and skills to develop community projects – 20 of the projects have received seed funding, for implementing initiatives. Most importantly, a good relationship was forged between the two municipalities Jiquilisco and Tecoluca, and groups and organizations in the municipalities are now working together. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on NIMD El Salvador’s programming, as they had to resort to using digital platforms. This new approach faced significant challenges, especially in the rural areas and places with poor connectivity. Consequently, this left out a large part of the rural population that does not have internet. Once the pandemic was over, NIMD El Salvador went back to their usual approach.



Country highlight Guatemala

Strengthening youth in their own communities

Understanding and adapting to the local context is important in NIMD Guatemala's work. The long-standing programme Youth +D trains young people on a municipal level, involving them in strengthening collective and grassroots organizations in their local communities through a dialogue approach with municipality representatives. Local advocacy for youth participation highlights the direct impact on the community.



³ The project aims to promote meaningful and effective participation of youth between 18 and 29 years especially young women from vulnerable rural areas, in local decision-making processes and peace building.

Guatemala

Country trends in youth political participation

With [61% of its inhabitant under 30](#), Guatemala's youth population is considered the largest in Latin America. While the youth demographic represents an opportunity in theory, that is not the case in practice. Many young people face deprivation, poor opportunities, insecurity, unemployment, and a lack of basic services. Youth are marginalized and left out of decision making. Guatemalan young people continue to face vulnerability to exploitation, insecurity, and exposure in violent conflict.

The current political climate in Guatemala is challenging for youth and their participation. Young people are discouraged from participating in a system that seems resistant to change and accountability. Young people's political participation is hampered because of negative age-related perceptions and mistrust between generations, as youth are often instrumentalized or viewed as not capable or experienced enough to contribute to plans or proposals. At the institutional level such as local municipalities, there is lack of support for young people who want to get involved in politics. Poverty, economic challenges, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened inequalities that hinder young people's effective engagement in politics.

Youth perceive political engagement as endangering their lives, as they face the threat of violence from prevalent organized gangs in the country. Moreover, discrimination and exclusion of indigenous people impede indigenous youth's participation in politics. Other factors that make youth participation difficult in Guatemala include corruption and lack of accountable governance and deterioration of human rights situation including limited press freedom. Negative stereotypes, ethnic stigmatization and perceptions in society limit acceptance of young people's ideas and perspectives.

At the same time, youth are organizing politically, and [the 2023 electoral process](#) is evidence for that fact. Although young people are largely excluded from political party structures, they have found ways to organize in response to local and national events. One example was the demonstrations in 2015, a turning point for youth participation and mobilization. More recently, youth have stepped up, protesting and leading political activism and agitating the electoral processes.



Example of interventions

To increase political participation among youth, NIMD Guatemala has partnered with - youth-led - civil society organizations to implement different programmes - to push for the inclusion of young people in politics. Noteworthy, NIMD Guatemala's interventions have helped to break down barriers that limit political participation and have stimulated young people to become more involved in their communities, including those in remote areas. NIMD Guatemala prioritizes collaborating with the most marginalized groups in decision-making processes, such as youth from rural areas, young activists, indigenous youth and youth from LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, NIMD's Democracy Schools have empowered young people by provided them with tools to tackle barriers to political participation, strengthened their sense of leadership, improved their self-esteem and confidence, and contributed to their personal development and sense of belonging. NIMD Guatemala's partnership with youth organizations strengthened their position and their collective coordination and identity as young people. The interventions have promoted political participation among the youth by encouraging young people to take on leadership roles and especially become more involved in their communities. The [Youth +D programme](#) for example strengthens youth participation on municipality level by trainings and dialogues to develop youth policies on municipality level. Additionally, the activities have helped young people to overcome cultural and identity barriers that impede their political participation.

Country highlight Tunisia

Fresh tackling new forms of youth participation

Fresh is an alternative media channel and an open space for non-engaged youth to express their opinions and discuss topics related to the national context and public affairs. This project is the essence of years of reflecting on the national context and the youth's reaction towards it and thinking about how to better respond to their needs and how to approach them. We eventually understood that a new language accompanied new forms of youth participation.



Tunisia

Country trends in youth political participation

Almost 48% of the population is under 30 in Tunisia. Youth participation in politics has been described as puzzling, as there has been a decline contrary to the expectations after the 2011 Arab Spring – an uprising against economic, social and political exclusion of amongst other young people. Studies show that a significantly low number of young people are members of political parties, and many are not interested, disengaged, or excluded from political processes including elections. Noteworthy, Tunisian youth are politically engaged, but not in the formal politics – voting, joining political parties, or running for office. Instead, youth in Tunisia are engaged in informal politics – through civil society organizations or protesting.

According to [Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung \(FES\) study conducted in 2021](#), 83% of young people have little or no interest in politics. Most of them reject voting and involvement in political parties, and instead prefer informal forms of political expression and collective action. Some of the obstacles to young people's participation in Tunisia include; relegation of youth and their issues, partisan frameworks, and disregard of young people's needs. At the same time, political parties and their leadership have become impervious to change and remain inaccessible to young people – the average age of parliament is about 52 years. Similarly, government cannot develop policies to meet young people's needs and support institutions in charge of youth affairs with statutes and budgets. Moreover, young people's low economic empowerment has contributed to their disengagement in politics. In some case cultural obstacles including dominant social culture and people's behavior in different spaces impede young people's political participation.

Example of interventions

In response to these dynamics, the Centre for Mediterranean and International Studies (CEMI) designs and implements programmes to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the youth and promote political participation. CEMI responded to the changing national context, realizing the need to focus on new forms of participation through non-engaged youth and non-formal participation. Examples include the Freesh media channel, the [Tunisia School of Politics](#), the digital platform Nouabook between members of parliament and voters to connect with non-engaged youth, and a training programme with the youth council.

These programmes from CEMI have helped change youth's negative views about politics for those disconnected from public affairs. As well as training activities, CEMI has developed a range of engagements such as dialogue and debates among young people and with other actors, such as Multiparty Dialogue Platform and Youth Collaborative Platform for Dialogue amongst young people. Through CEMI's exchanges and debate programmes, youth have developed the confidence to speak out, express themselves, and participate in politics while encouraging collaboration among young people and together with politicians. At the same time, CEMI's engagements with political parties and civic actors have encouraged them to pay keen attention to youth participation and strengthen collaborations.

⁴ Numbers are retrieved from Census 2014 from the Institut National de la Statistique.



Country highlight Uganda

Superficial mechanisms of youth participation

Uganda's political structure incorporates various mechanisms designed to facilitate youth participation. However, these mechanisms can be criticized, as they often seem superficial and tokenistic. They remain in informal spheres of politics or are instrumentalized by powerful politicians. Political parties need to be more effective in concretizing youth participation at a grassroots level. Lack of access to information, exclusive political culture and high levels of poverty continue to hinder involvement of the youth in these mechanisms.



Uganda

Country trends in youth political participation

Democracy in Uganda has been ailing. According to the Freedom House report, the National Resistance Movement, the ruling party, has continued to retain power, while patronage, intimidation and politicized persecutions of opposition leaders prevail. Also, the country's media faces censorship and the operating space for civil society, especially those in areas of human rights and governance, continues to experience close monitoring and scrutiny by government and state agencies. In such a context, participation in democratic and active citizenship, especially for youth, remains a challenge.

Notably, Uganda has the second youngest population in the world - more than 75% are younger than 35 years old. However, young people continue to face many barriers as they seek to engage in political life. Youth remain underrepresented in political parties and excluded in decision-making processes. Youth participation and representation channels have remained hierarchical and infused with patronage. Youth lack genuine opportunities for meaningful participation, and their inclusion is often used to manipulate and suppress dissenting voices. Currently, Uganda's main political leadership structures are occupied by people above 60 years, which can be attributed to the current regime's 37 years of power. The decision-making powers of the youth within parties as an overall governance structure are limited. While youth may assume leadership roles within youth structures and mainstream leadership and participate in party mobilization efforts, their influence in policy and decision-making processes within these political parties remains minimal. Also, few resources are devoted to the political and civic education of young people, which results in many of them lacking knowledge regarding the political systems.

More efforts are still required to address systemic and structural challenges, including hindrances such as the closure of voter registration a year before the election, monetization of politics, poverty and lack of access to information. Other challenges include disregard of youth leadership capabilities, shrinking civic space in the country, gender stereotypes that discourage young women from participating in politics, and failure by political parties to concretize youth participation at the grassroots level. Moreover, young women politicians face additional hurdles on top of the existing and deeply entrenched discrimination. Young women encounter resistance both from within their political parties and the public because of gender stereotypes and negative cultural norms.



Example of interventions

NIMD Uganda and Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) have produced re-markable results, especially through targeted training of youth leaders and the establishment of platforms for dialogue and civic engagement. The latter includes an annual national symposium on youth in politics and the creation of the Multiparty Youth Forum that brings together both statutory and non-statutory youth representative mechanisms and structures. The Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs has partnered with NIMD Uganda to organize the annual symposium on youth in politics, an intergenerational dialogue on democracy, and policy training for youth leaders, among other initiatives. Through these interventions, and the [Uganda Democracy Academy](#), youth have developed a capacity in leadership and built networks. Overall, the interventions have continued to enhance young people's participation in political processes, which strengthens democracy. Furthermore, AMwA employs a feminist transformative approach in various initiatives, including the African Women Leaders Institute and a mentorship programme designed for both young and senior women in politics. These interventions have strengthened youth leaders' understanding of feminism, supported young women in their quest to create change through engagement in the political spaces, and lobbied political parties to develop and enforce gender-responsive policies and practices. As a result of the interventions, there is increased collective voice and attention to youth political participation in Uganda.

GLOBAL CHALLENGES FOR **YOUTH** POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

All over the world, there seems to be a lack of data and research on youth political participation. [Tracking progress is complicated at international and national levels as data is missing.](#) This makes it difficult to engage in evidence-based advocacy and policymaking. As international and national development strategies, as well as NGO interventions, should be based on research and reliable information, this gap in data and knowledge becomes a critical challenge to planning and priority-setting efforts.

By analyzing the case studies, as presented above, we aspire to contribute to a better overview of developments in the field of youth political participation around the world. This chapter captures key challenges in tackling youth participation, arising from country-specific contexts and trends identified through the case studies.

Limited political will

Across the world, youth continue to be under-represented in decision-making bodies, including political parties. Political parties pay little attention to young people – and their structures, often based on hierarchy, discipline, and in some cases patronage, do not always suit young people and can exclude them. This can be explained by the adult-centric public institutions, as highlighted in Colombia's case. Political parties have become impervious to change, inaccessible to young

people, and unreceptive to new ideas, especially ideas from youth, be it due to socio-cultural perceptions, stereotypes of youth, regressive political culture and distrust between generations. As youth are under-represented in political parties, they are also often largely absent from parliament and government. Although Tunisian youth have been at the forefront of the social movements and protests, they found themselves excluded from strategies, decision-making processes or executive meetings.



CEMI's case showed that the static hierarchical structure of political parties hindered young people's capacity to voice their opinions, making political parties not attractive to young people. Consequently, the number of youth in political parties in Tunisia has even declined in recent years. A similar movement is observed in El Salvador's case, where even a new younger parliament refuses to continue efforts from past legislations to organize young people better politically and young parliamentarians continued in the same manner of their predecessors without addressing the problems of young people. Current political leadership is not able or willing to invest effectively in youth as a central action for inclusive development.

The under-representation of youth frequently stems from the limited political will of current political leadership. **To move beyond descriptive participation, it is crucial to bridge the gap between young people and their political leadership through a holistic approach.**



Vulnerability

The growing socio-economic inequalities and insecurity in many countries have exacerbated the challenges faced by some of society's most vulnerable groups. This includes youth. Youth unemployment and insecurity are recurring themes across the case studies. Vulnerability is driving youth to prefer short-term benefits as their future is uncertain and insecure. **In Tunisia, political parties rarely pay attention to youth issues and seem incapable of producing public policies for young people, fueling the rift between political parties and young people.** Governments are often falling short in designing effective programmes for youth development and participation, resulting in youth frequently feeling overlooked or left behind. On top of that, youth are often co-opted when entering politics and youth are often exploited for political means, such as being 'voter machines.' To build on that, the case studies from Colombia and Guatemala showed that young people in these countries are vulnerable to exploitation, involvement and intimidation in conflicts due to their low socio-economic position and growing insecurities in the country.

Implementation gap

Many countries have taken legal and regulatory steps to encourage young people to participate in politics. Countries have adopted laws and set up institutions and policies to promote youth development and political participation. For example, countries have signed and ratified relevant treaties, included provisions in their constitutions and formulated youth policies. Some have set up youth ministries and national youth councils. The international commitments and national actions exist as a sign of intention to advance youth political participation.

However, there is a challenge when it comes to converting aspirations into action and implementation of such commitments – and ensuring meaningful participation of young men and women. Uganda, for example, has multiple mechanisms for youth participation within the political spheres, but the case study showed that such mechanisms remain superficial and within the informal spheres, while failing to be translated to grassroots levels. Initiatives and legal frameworks for youth participation within El Salvador’s government and institutions have also often not been implemented, updated or even withdrawn. **El Salvador’s case notes that young people were also not consulted or included in the development of such efforts. Evidently, implementation of youth participation is necessary but requires political will.**

High cost of politics

The high cost of politics is a major concern for young people in many countries where low levels of economic empowerment have been identified as one of the main barriers for youth in each case study. Running for political office is expensive, a factor that locks many young people out of contests. For example, young people in Burkina Faso do not have sufficient financial means, given their unstable socio-professional situation and youth unemployment, while politics is dominated by money, and financial capacity is a basic criterion for candidate lists of political parties. This gives young people in Burkina Faso an unfavourable position in comparison to adults. Uganda’s case also highlights the monetization of politics and high nomination fees for candidates. In many cases, there is no specific funding for young candidates, while most youth are not able to raise the required resources, such as nomination fees and campaign funds, to mobilize support.

Broad scope of exclusion

We have tried to list several factors that contribute to youth exclusion around the world. However, it must be stressed that the exclusion of youth cannot, unfortunately, be attributed to one lacking measure, norm, or practice. Instead, youth exclusion is most often the result of a wide variety of different factors that, in turn, reinforce each other even beyond the political spheres. For example, young people in Burkina Faso face low levels of economic empowerment and social-cultural constraints on the position of youth in society at large, including negative perceptions of politics and perceptions of young people. Young women especially experience stereotypes such as unsuitability for politics. In most countries, these include failed government programmes, weak political institutions, lack of access to education, youth unemployment, poverty, growing security challenges and cultural norms. Such dynamics have also been observed in the Guatemala’s case, as poverty, economic challenges, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic have increased inequalities within society at large and specifically experienced by young people. As such, it is not easy to address the question of youth political participation without tackling the underlying factors, including youth unemployment, growing insecurity, and cultural norms that deny youth the power to engage as equal members of society. **As PoD partners we can not address all of these factors, but we believe that the inclusion of youth can lead to policies addressing their needs better.**

BEST PRACTICES ACROSS THE WORLD



The trends discussed above are typical for all six countries and likely also shape youth participation in politics in many other countries worldwide. They provide a significant challenge for organizations that want to support youth to become, or stay, politically active in democracies.

What is the best way to develop support programmes for youth that take these challenges into account? This chapter is dedicated to answering this crucial question. It summarizes the key lessons learned in our implementation of youth participation interventions in the different contexts. These can inspire and inform new programmes and interventions to support youth political participation across the globe – regardless of the specific context. The best practices are lessons that are relevant around the world, although each context is different.

Diversity and inclusion

In our experience, ensuring diversity and inclusion in interventions is crucial - and works. Each case study reveals that interventions take into consideration and engage young people of varied identities and different regional backgrounds, races, ethnicities, disabilities, sexual orientations and genders. This goes for both the participants in the programmes and the facilitators.

In every context, it is important to appreciate that youth are not a

homogenous group. It is vital to acknowledge the multitude of diversity and intersectionality that exist and build the interventions or programmes around them. **Colombia's case warns us that homogenization of young people makes their diverse identities and needs invisible, potentially leading to some young people falling behind.** In the case of Tunisia, CEMI emphasized it has developed different and tailor-made training programmes for different groups of youth; and NIMD El Salvador, where interventions were designed to fit the needs and aspirations of diverse young people including LGBTQIA+ youth, young people with disabilities and indigenous youth.

Build a wide variety of partnerships

Organizations that want to support youth political participation need partners. One of the priorities of PoD partners is to build and strengthen partnerships with other actors in the youth political participation space. We have found ways of building partnerships and working together with governments and civil society at the local, national, regional, and global level. The joint efforts have helped in the realization of a greater positive impact in the efforts to ensure young people's active and meaningful participation. This multi-layered and wide scope of strategic partnerships from the sub-national to the international level has become an effective tool for strengthening interventions in complex working environments.

One example is NIMD El Salvador, which implemented a youth and peace project, in partnership with UNFPA and UNESCO. They also built relationships with two sub-national municipalities, which have helped the project to succeed. NIMD Guatemala's case showed that the partnership with local youth organizations and civil society

strengthened the efforts of these organizations and their ability to promote youth participation at a grassroots level. NIMD Uganda, on the other hand, partnered with the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs. This partnership resulted in, for instance, the annual Youth in Politics symposium, an intergenerational dialogue on democracy, and a policy training.





Training of trainers and development of networks

Fostering networks and creating ‘multipliers’ can amplify the impact of youth programmes. The creation of positive and productive learning for facilitators of youth programmes is therefore essential. Equally important is the need to effectively engage and work with so-called ‘multipliers,’ people who are trained to train others. For example, CEMI in Tunisia conducts Training of Trainers with their alumni from their Tunisia School of Politics, and this was a clear recommendation from Guatemala’s case. As a result, these young people can become trainers in their respective organizations. In addition, youth programmes also need

to effectively engage and build networks with young people who took part in earlier interventions or programmes to develop and set out new interventions and programmes with them. For example, NIMD Burkina Faso continues the engagement with their alumni, building a network of politically active youth around them. This is also highly appreciated by the young people in Guatemala, as they can share plans and engage in enriching dialogues. This strategy maximizes the reach and impact of current and future interventions.

Youth inclusion in the design and implementation of activities

Young people need to be included in the design and implementation of every programme and intervention aimed at supporting youth. This inclusion increases the quality and ownership of those participating in it. In addition - and equally important - it increases the attractiveness of the programme for youth. **Often, young people do not engage in programmes that seek to enhance political participation because they find them ‘boring and old school.’**

We have made a point of including young people in the design and implementation of their programme. For example, at the inception phase of their joint activities, AMwA and NIMD Uganda identified youth as key actors of change and as stakeholders who would work with them to facilitate change. AMwA together with NIMD Uganda partnered with young political leaders and actors such as the National Youth Council, Multiparty Youth Forum, and young members of parliament. They were involved in the development of the concept note, the design, and plans for the engagements. NIMD El Salvador also included young people from the conception phase of trainings to enforce a co-creation of programmes. The young people were consulted heavily beforehand through a questionnaire, interview, and a focus group to validate their needs and plan accordingly.

Create safe spaces for youth

Young people need safe spaces. Democratic spaces allow young people to engage with decision-makers, and facilitating this engagement is at the core of our work. Democratic space however, is shrinking in many countries, hindering the participation of young people and increasing insecurity. Youth in conflict or political crisis countries find it hard to participate in politics, as they are feeling threatened and unable to move or voice their opinions freely. This is at least the case in El Salvador and Colombia. Where in El Salvador, the changing political context obliged an increased focus on self-care, protection and the construction of safe networks among young people and youth organizations and ensuring safe spaces to exchange. Having a safe space can empower youth by providing them with opportunities to gather and participate in different activities but also talk and engage freely.



Adaptivity

The effectiveness of youth programmes is strongly dependent on the adaptivity of the organization. Many interventions have, for example, turned – planned and unplanned – to utilizing more digital approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic, as seen in countries like Colombia, Guatemala, and El Salvador. The use of innovative techniques in virtual training and the continuous improvement of methodologies and approaches demonstrate our commitment to youth participation. Nonetheless, it must be stated that while digital adaptivity has many benefits, inclusion remains a considerable concern. The unfortunate reality is that many people, particularly young individuals in remote areas where internet connectivity is lacking access - often find themselves left behind. Efforts should be made to ensure no youth is left behind as organizations embrace technology.

Adaptivity is also important as part of adaptive programming cycles, which are evidence-based and use lessons learned from ongoing programming. Putting in place a robust evaluation system, monitoring the changes in the political environment, and making subsequent adjustments are critical and allow for a process of continuous feedback and strengthening of interventions.

NIMD Colombia has various evaluation mechanisms in place to identify opportunities for improvement of interventions and, in the same way, to guarantee the fulfilment of project objectives. As a result, NIMD Colombia managed to generate adjustment strategies such as virtual sessions, modification of methodologies and their scope, and working with organizations specialized in safety and security to standardize security protocols.

This allowed early warnings to be raised for the postponement of actions, suspension of actions or restructuring of the action. NIMD El Salvador has, for example, developed close working relationships with the police at the local level, so they are aware of (potential) threats and other security risks. **By adapting their interventions based on the latest information, they can provide a safe and secure environment for youth, even in contexts where the security situation can change rapidly.** Ultimately, adaptivity is crucial for ensuring a safe working environment for both staff and programme participants.

Innovation in development and delivery of programmes

Innovative approaches are especially relevant for youth participation in reaching those excluded from formal decision-making. Young people have different ways of participating in politics, and working with them often requires a different approach. New forms of youth participation and youth-friendly language are required to engage with youth in politics. For example, NIMD Colombia developed and executed different actions around the opening of spaces for citizens' participation, applying public innovation methodologies of deliberative democracy and differential approaches such as gender and youth in a cross-cutting manner. Innovation is also crucial for CEMI in Tunisia, as young people are increasingly disengaged from politics and not interested in politics. To approach those who are not interested in public affairs, **CEMI changed their approach to innovative methods such as digital platforms, social media, and podcasts. Innovation is crucial to meet the interests and needs of today's youth.**



RECOMMENDATIONS AND A WAY FORWARD

Through this publication we, the PoD partners, aim to inform our partner's and other practitioners' work on youth political participation. The review of the case studies and analysis provided informs recommendations outlined below for practitioners working on youth political participation and political actors to involve youth in politics.

Practitioners should:

- Advocate for **increased research on youth political participation** to raise awareness about the risks and opportunities associated with young people's evolving political perspectives and citizenship norms.
- Develop a **simple analytical framework** to enable actors to self-assess obstacles to youth political participation and opportunities in advancing youth participation at local, regional, and national level.
- Strengthen programmes that target youth in political parties and political leadership to address the challenges that impede political participation and ensure strong political commitment from senior leadership of political parties in countries.
- Facilitate **inter-generational dialogue** between young and political leadership in politics. This type of dialogue is key in unlocking the opportunities for young people, building trust between the generations, and stimulating political will from political leadership for youth participation.
- Facilitate effective engagement and **close collaboration with young people and youth organizations** in strategy and programme development, starting from the inception of programme design.
- Facilitate building **bridges between informal and formal forms of participation** of young people. Young people are very active in informal spheres but are seemingly unable to make the step to formal participation in politics.
- Develop strategies for collaboration with other partners including government, civil society, and the private sector to promote youth political participation **from an integration approach**.
- **Utilize existing youth mechanisms** in institutions such as national youth policies and national youth councils for advocacy on youth political participation.
- Provide youth with **youth-friendly information** through targeted education campaigns to enable their participation. When young people are informed, they get involved.
- Develop programmes targeting **youth from diverse backgrounds**, especially those who are marginalized and usually excluded.

Political actors should:

- Promote mechanisms of **participatory policy-making and co-decision** by young people in key decisions and across policy fields, beyond youth affairs.
- Support the **reform of youth councils** to ensure adequate funding and formal input into policy and decision-making processes.
- Reduce **vulnerability, social inequality and insecurity within the country** that impede effective youth political participation.
- Foster a **multi-sectoral and an integrated vision for youth** development and participation. Youth participation is cross-cutting and needs a multi-sectoral and integrated approach.
- Improve youth participation in party affairs by providing **enabling mechanisms** and developing opportunities such as strengthening leadership academies for young people.
- Improve young people's inclusion and representation in the political party structures **beyond youth wings**, such as including youth representatives in decision-making structures.
- Invest in **grassroots activities for youth**, trickling down the national policies to local levels.

A way **forward**

Youth political participation is critical for the success of any democracy. In this publication, we emphasized the importance of breaking down barriers and giving young people opportunities to participate in shaping the future of the Democracy.

Young people are demanding their voice be heard through informal forms of participation. A comprehensive approach is required to encourage, facilitate, and enable meaningful youth political participation on all levels of decision-making. Youth participation needs to go hand in hand with adaptivity and innovative programming, co-creation of programmes with youth, advocating for the implementation of youth legislation and inclusion mechanisms, commitment from political leadership and an integrative lens concerning the broad exclusion of youth and security and economic development. What is certain is that politics needs youth.

Youth political participation is essential for an inclusive and sustainable democracy. What is required is a shift in mindset, political will, and a societal-wide. **Through collaborative action, we can amplify the voices of youth and foster a culture of dialogue, ensuring their meaningful seat at the table.**

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