



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.

OUR SUMMARY

Amplifying youth's a 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 processes 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 .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 practise 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 trustbuilding.

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 Freesh 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.