

POLICY INSIGHTS

# MEANINGFUL YOUTH

# ENGAGEMENT

TIME TO DELIVER

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

NORRAG's work on meaningful youth engagement aims to surface fresh analytical perspectives and under-represented expertise about youth engagement and its consequences for education and sustainability globally. Despite resurgent interest in youth engagement, many young people experience youth engagement practices as shallow or performative. To advance both understanding and practice, this project asks: How can we improve meaningful youth engagement and unleash the full power of youth participation, partnership and action? Youth who have been engaged in—or have tried to engage in—governance processes are best placed to help others understand how to work with them.

This publication collates contributions from youth to advance world-leading and world-changing, youth-led practices for meaningful youth engagement. Meaningful youth engagement can only be achieved by listening to youth and mobilising the trust of youth. This Policy Insights collection seeks to surface and amplify young leaders' expertise on how best to engage youth for a better today and tomorrow. By so doing, readers can learn from youth experts in order to better work with them.

More information: [www.norrag.org/meaningful-youth-engagement](http://www.norrag.org/meaningful-youth-engagement)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

To advance both understanding and practice, NORRAG convened 55 youth experts from 31 countries in 6 continents to advance world-leading and world-changing youth-led practices for meaningful youth engagement. A full list of the authors who contributed to this publication, including their biographies, can be found at the end of this publication. The publication is edited by Carolina R. Earle, NORRAG's Youth Engagement Specialist, and Moira V. Faul, NORRAG's Executive Director. They also introduce the publication. A foreword to the publication is provided by Heela Yoon, a Young Leader for SDGs with The United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and Founder of Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP).

## ABOUT NORRAG

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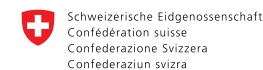
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# FOREWORD

## Heela Yoon

Founder of Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace (AYAP) and Young Leader for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with The United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Afghanistan

As a refugee and the daughter of parents who survived the devastation of civil war, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that conflict, displacement, and systemic exclusion can have on individuals and entire communities. The stories of my parents, alongside my own experiences growing up amidst these realities, have shaped my understanding of how critical meaningful youth engagement and education are—not just as tools for personal empowerment, but as lifelines for rebuilding lives and communities. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we listen to the voices of those directly affected by conflict and displacement, particularly youth, and bring their perspectives into both research and policy discussions.

This engagement is essential to driving change, as youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but also key actors today.

For women and girls in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Palestine, and South Sudan, education is not just about academic growth—it is about survival, resilience, and the possibility of healing from the trauma of violence and loss. Education provides a pathway to self-determination, particularly in regions where access to learning is often denied or severely restricted. Meaningful youth engagement goes beyond education; it involves creating spaces for young people to actively participate in shaping the policies that impact their lives. By fostering youth leadership,

especially in conflict zones, we ensure that their voices and experiences are integral to the rebuilding process.

However, education and engagement alone are not enough. We need real, sustained partnership and collaboration with youth to design policies that promote inclusion, particularly for women and girls in conflict zones. Too often, discussions take place in policy rooms far removed from the realities on the ground, while grassroots leaders and those most affected remain unheard. Their voices must be front and center in shaping both the design and implementation of education and governance policies in these regions. This requires a commitment not only

to accountability and action but to genuine collaboration with affected young people.

Having lived through this chaos, I know how important it is to integrate the lived experiences of young refugees, displaced persons, and grassroots leaders into research and policy insights. Their stories, struggles, and solutions should not only inform academic discourse but also guide practical strategies for change. We cannot afford to overlook the wisdom and resilience of these communities; their leadership and firsthand knowledge are crucial to building sustainable solutions.

This Policy Insights collection offers perspectives on how meaningful youth participation, inclusive governance, and the engagement of marginalized communities can reshape our approach to education and empowerment in conflict-affected regions. From Afghanistan to South Sudan, women and youth are leading efforts to create meaningful change within their communities, often with limited resources and in the face of overwhelming odds. It is imperative that we support them—not just with words, but with real actions that address the root causes of their struggles and empower them to take charge of their futures.

Achieving this requires more than just policy shifts—it requires real work on the ground to implement and sustain transformative changes. We must ensure that the global community's commitment to youth, education, and inclusion is not confined to high-level meetings but manifests in the everyday lives of those affected. This means building systems that hold decision-makers accountable and ensuring that the progress we seek translates into tangible benefits for the people who need it most.

As someone who has lived these experiences, I am honored to share this selection of Policy Insights, which brings together diverse perspectives on the transformative power of

education and youth participation. My hope is that this collection will inspire us all to listen more closely to the voices of those on the front lines and take meaningful steps toward creating a more just and inclusive world for all.

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# INTRODUCTION: YOUNG PEOPLE MATTER FOR TODAY'S WORLD AS WELL AS FOR TOMORROW'S

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*Within systems often not built for them, young people have been changing the world for the better. It's time to listen to their dreams, and time to change the world hand in hand with them. It's time to deliver on meaningful youth engagement.*

Each day, young people are making change now. They are challenging governments on their duties to provide a liveable climate in courts from [South Korea](#) to the [European Court of Human Rights](#), and are engaging with governance processes in their communities, countries and internationally. In doing so, they are contributing to realising more sustainable and peaceful presents and futures for us all.

The United Nations Secretary-General convened world leaders in a once-in-a-generation [Summit of the Future](#) in September 2024, to adopt the [Pact for the Future](#) in order to reinvigorate multilateral efforts for sustainability and peace. Under the pillar “Youth and Future Generations”, Actions 34 and 35 aim to improve youth engagement at national and international levels. Such improvements in youth engagement also promise systemic impacts across all Pact for the Future actions.

And yet, many young people experience youth engagement practices as shallow or performative. How can we improve meaningful youth engagement and unleash the full power of youth participation, partnership and action?

## Learning from Youth

Youth who have been engaged in—or have tried to engage in—governance processes are best placed to help others understand how to work with them.

To advance both understanding and practice, NORRAG convened 55 youth experts from 31 countries to advance world-leading and world-changing youth-led practices for meaningful youth engagement. Meaningful youth engagement can only be achieved by listening to youth and mobilising and building the trust of youth; this Policy Insights collection allows us to learn from youth experts in order to better work with them.

## Mutuality and Meaning

*“Without community there is no liberation”*

Audre Lorde

For decision makers, in particular, meaningful youth engagement means recognising the mutuality of our relationships: nurturing at the same time as being nurtured by young people,

teaching at the same time as learning from young people, enriching at the same time as being enriched by young people, speaking to at the same time as supporting the speech of young people.

Youth who are taking action must be honoured, but also protected: many are speaking in the face of great adversity and at great risk to themselves, with few guarantees of safety. There is nothing grasping about requesting the resources necessary to enable full and inclusive youth participation: demanding that youth finance themselves is fundamentally discriminatory.

The core values of interconnectedness, and the belief that one's humanity is deeply tied to the well-being of others are universal themes in Indigenous knowledge systems around the world. The best known example of this is *Ubuntu* in South Africa or *Unhu / Ubuntu* in Zimbabwe: frequently transliterated as “I am because you are”. In addition, we find a similar ancient Indian concept *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which is comparable to *Ayni* in many Andean cultures of South America and *Mitákuye Oyás'in* among the Lakota people in North America, *Kapwa* in Filipino culture, and *Whanaungatanga* in

Māori culture in New Zealand. The underlying principles of mutuality resonate across many knowledge systems globally, and can usefully be applied to bring meaning into intergenerational dialogue in governance of communities, organisations, governments and multilateral structures and processes.

Leaning into a new politics, beyond conventional boundaries of “us and them”, to a spirit and practice of deep understanding and partnership, can bring us closer to building the worlds we want to live in, today and tomorrow.

### What is Needed to Improve Youth Engagement?

Contributors to this *Policy Insights* collection address this question in six ways:

1. Meaningfully **engaging** youth—particularly when so many have had their right to speak curtailed across various contexts—through existing structures, mechanisms and processes demands empowering youth through speech and affirmation strategies, fostering collective action, forming transformative partnerships with system-impacted young leaders, bridging gaps in political representation in Latin America, and enhancing inclusive decision-making and governance, while exploring the intersection of youth engagement and politics in the digital era across gender, generations, disciplines, and borders.

2. **Transforming** existing structures—and the world at large—entails radical engagement with youth as partners, empowering intergenerational feminist partnerships, global networked classrooms, and inclusive governance processes, focusing on empowering young women and girls from the Global Majority, enhancing youth involvement in peace and professional arenas, and redefining youth participation in policymaking from consultation to co-creation.

3. **Reordering** existing structures and ways of working asks who is not at the table, and works to centre those at the margins. This section therefore emphasises the importance of representation, integrating relevant Indigenous values into Indigenous youth participation, ensuring meaningful engagement with the Global South in governance processes, challenging the deployment of so-called neutrality as a tool of oppression, addressing systemic imbalances in education, and encouraging youth to redefine success beyond GDP.

4. The authors in the section on **movement-building** focus on supporting young people as they organise themselves. It highlights young people’s powerful activism as they change the world, drawing on examples of young people’s participation in civic spaces, analysing the challenges of horizontalism in Iran, drawing lessons from the African and Latin American movements of working children and youth, and examining the

inclusion of youth in Morocco’s democratic structures and processes.

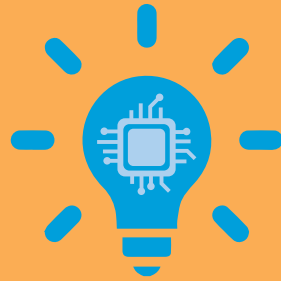
5. Contributors also highlight **network-building** as a key strategy for advancing and embedding youth participation in governance processes, including leadership by “opportunity youth” in Mexico City who have been sidelined from education and employment, vulnerable girls and young women empowering themselves to participate in governance in Mombasa, Kenya, engaging young people with disabilities, promoting the inclusion of Afghan youth perspectives, exposing Ukrainian young cadets to local and UN governance processes, preventing and countering violent extremism, and bringing young professionals to the centre of organisational governance processes.

6. Authors also show how, by **convening**, it is possible to unite generations in novel ways and use digital tools creatively, in order to share power to transform education, address missed opportunities with youth, create spaces for youth agency and leadership, position youth at the cutting edge of internet governance in India, co-design the future of learning, and empower youth through collaborative pathways for change.

### What Will Be the Legacy of those Who Are Currently in Power?

The world’s current trajectory necessitates a Pact for the Future to remind us of the enormous distance yet to be overcome if we are to meet the promise of the SDGs. Dark times call for bravery and engagement, such as that we see in the contributors to this *Policy Insights* collection.

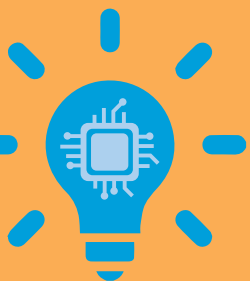
Each contribution reveals a small sliver of each young person’s brilliance. Learning from their insights will allow the light and brilliance of even more young people—and us all—to shine more brightly, and to forge a world which is brighter for all. Find in this collection guidance towards powerful directions and openings to improve the work that needs to be done to make this a world we all can thrive in.



# 1

## ENGAGING

Meaningfully engaging youth through existing structures, mechanisms and processes—particularly when so many have had their right to speak curtailed across various contexts—demands empowering youth through speech and affirmation strategies, fostering collective action, forming transformative partnerships with system-impacted young leaders, bridging gaps in political representation in Latin America, and enhancing inclusive decision-making and governance, while exploring the intersection of youth engagement and politics in the digital era across gender, generations, disciplines, and borders.



# SPEECH, POWER, AND AFFIRMATION STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## Jhonatan Almada

Innovation Center for Excellence in Public Policy, São Luís, Brazil

### Key takeaways:

Examine and change current youth engagement practices to avoid manipulation, symbolism, and decoration using the following:

- The speech strategy to actively listen to young people
- The power strategy to yield decision-making to youth
- The affirmation strategy to allow young people to tell their own stories in their own ways

Thinking about the engagement of young people in governance processes involves two fundamental moves. The first is reflecting on whether our practices correspond to effective processes of democratic participation. The second is implementing participation strategies that enable young people to speak out, exercise responsibility, and affirm their life stories. These strategies were developed in my work as an educational leader in Maranhão, the most unequal and poorest of Brazil's states.

Practices that do not achieve the meaningful engagement of young people in governance can be summarized as manipulation, symbolism, and decoration (Palhano, 2019). **Manipulation** corresponds to the insertion of young people in a planned way so that they act according to a predetermined plan and follow a script produced by adults. **Symbolism** is when young people are invited to take part in governance and have the right to speak according to protocol, but their ideas are not considered when decisions are made. **Decoration** is when young people are invited into governance spaces but do not have the right to speak—in other words, they function as decorative elements.

The governance bodies of the United Nations and national and local governments must examine their current youth engagement practices and identify whether they correspond to or differ from what I have listed as undesirable engagement practices: manipulation, symbolism, and decoration. In governance processes seeking to meaningfully engage youth, the free exercise of expression and thought cannot be restricted. Poorly designed planning and protocols can restrict participation; therefore, alternative processes are needed if what youth say, write, and deliberate is to be effectively used and considered in decision-making. Considering that the work of planning and evaluation requires the definition of criteria for indicators, I propose three practices as references for reflection and for improving the quality of youth engagement.

In Maranhão, I led the development of three distinct youth engagement strategies. Each strategy can be synthesized by one of the three keywords: speech, power, and affirmation. Each one corresponds to a practice for ensuring young people meaningfully exercise their right to participate in governance.

The strategy of **speech** creates opportunities for young people to exercise their right to speak. First, the responsible authorities engaged in governance processes should make themselves accessible to questioning by young people, in a free and non-directive way, regarding the issues young people spontaneously want to discuss (Freire, 1987). Second, the responsible authorities should listen to what young people have to say on a specific topic, such as the futures of education recently proposed by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) and other important documents. Consulting young people is crucial for addressing global, national, and local issues and should expand beyond youth-specific topics to effectively harness their valuable perspectives and contributions.

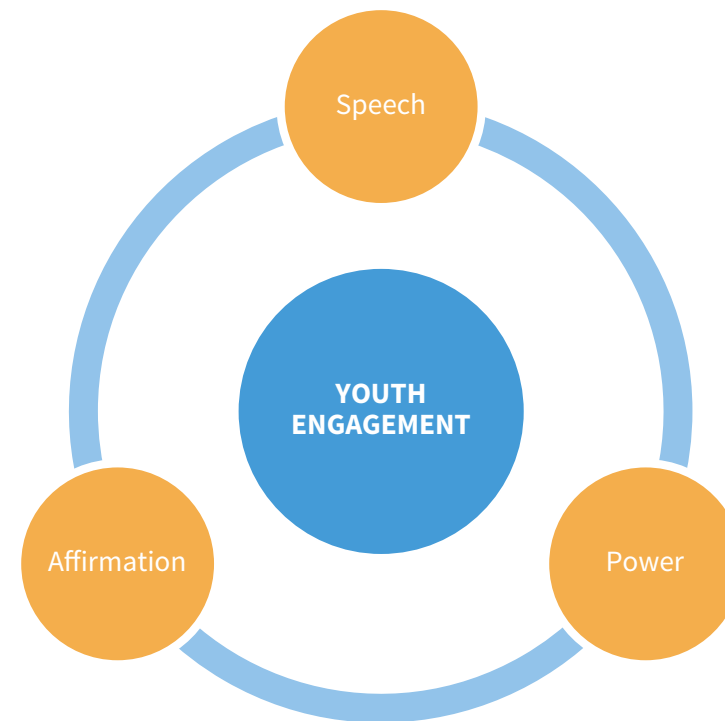
The **power** strategy involves giving young people the opportunity to exercise public decision-making functions. It implies that the responsible authorities must transfer their position of power to young people for a certain period, creating a space for learning and political education. This can be exemplified by the International Day of the Girl, when girls take on public functions and responsibilities for a

day. We can think of this as a type of simulation of how political representation functions in collegiate bodies.

The **affirmation** strategy involves enabling young people to express their ideas and identities in different formats and media, such as through competitions, books, videos, photos, audio, drawings, and texts. Telling their own stories is a way of responding to and overcoming the crisis of narration that we are going through. Symptomatic of this crisis is the global growth in the number of young people who neither study nor work—that is, they are not afforded adequate opportunities and often cannot see themselves represented in the worlds of education and work. The deployment of a positive “affirmation” strategy can be exemplified by the action of the United Nations Office in Brazil, which held a competition on the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Students were encouraged to present their views on the UDHR through texts and drawings.

Young people as subjects of rights need to have multiple and diverse opportunities for speech, power, and affirmation, whether at local, national, or international levels. These concrete strategies for action avoid the undesirable practices of manipulation, symbolism, and decoration and promote desirable practices of effective and meaningful youth involvement in decision-making.

**Figure 1**  
Effective Strategies for Ensuring Young People Meaningfully Exercise their Right to Participate in Governance



Source: Author

# PARTNERSHIPS TO TRANSFORM SYSTEMS WITH SYSTEM-IMPACTED YOUNG LEADERS

## Iliana Pujols

Youth First Justice Collaborative, United States of America

### Key takeaways:

- For adult decision makers:
  - Recognise system-impacted youth as experts, and treat them as you would adults or other experts (including in terms of payment).
  - Encourage youth participation in programme decisions, with clear support mechanisms in place to ensure that youth are equipped with the skills they need to participate confidently.
  - Provide continuous learning and leadership opportunities for youth, and be open to learning from youth yourself.
- For adult decision makers and system-impacted youth:
  - Co-create group agreements and take on shared responsibilities.
  - Take the time to prepare for meetings consistently and reflect regularly on learnings.
  - Where possible, prioritise building genuine relationships and mutual understandings.

Globally, youth legal systems look very different. Policies on how youth crime is addressed and how youth are supported differ based on geographical location. When deciding how to address particular issues (whether legal, housing, economic, or child welfare), the most valuable insights to be considered arguably originate from those who are impacted by the existing system. Nevertheless, in designing policies to transform youth crime, many policymakers tend to overlook the value and importance of involving system-impacted young people as meaningful partners.

### Authentic Partnering with Youth

However, transformative actions and meaningful partnerships are possible. Numerous organisations have created and continue to strengthen their partnership pipelines through youth leadership opportunities, diversifying executive boards to authentically include youth, hiring youth staff, prioritising funding for youth-led organisations, and more.

There are many examples of authentic partnerships to draw from across the map. The Youth First Justice Collaborative acts as a technical assistance hub for 15 U.S. states.

We develop and execute campaigns alongside system-impacted young leaders to reinvest in community solutions and resources, and close youth prisons. The key to operating meaningfully is identifying an authentic process that places system-impacted youth at the forefront of the work. In this context, authenticity may require challenging historical practices, reimagining partners and allies, or even rebuilding a foundation from scratch. To build such partnerships, adult leaders must be prepared to support, learn from, and work alongside youth to ensure that they have the tools necessary to operate as partners and lead transformative actions.

Fostering meaningful engagement means cultivating authentic partnerships. Forming and maintaining *authentic* partnerships requires much more extensive work than basic logistical planning—it calls for a long-term commitment to centre impact in every decision made by partners and leaders.

In our work, “engagement” means inviting someone to the party, whereas partnership is planning the party collaboratively. Although engagement is a crucial step in forming partnerships, it should not be the end goal. To

meaningfully work alongside youth in any space, it is imperative to avoid getting stuck in the “engagement” phase.

### Ways to Differentiate Partnership from Engagement

To cultivate a meaningful collaboration with young people, you, as adult partners, must have a clear understanding of your “why”—the rationale behind your partnership. Why do you want to partner with system-impacted youth in your policy-making? Why are such partnerships important for transformative work? It is critical to spend the time and energy necessary to get to the bottom of this, and to access the help you need to think this through. Understanding your “why” allows you to build awareness of ‘how’ to engage others in the work you do.

Meaningful partnerships with young people can only be sustained when policymakers are highly intentional about designing such partnerships—this means offering not only an invitation to the table but also the capacity to share equal power at that table. Partnerships should be centred on equitable practices, treating youth partners the same way as “traditional partners”.

### Partnering with System-Impacted Youth

Some non-youth or non-system-impacted groups view system-impacted youth either as undereducated or as individuals who do not share a level of expertise as compared to other “experts” in the room. These assumptions may manifest and impact system-impacted youth in different ways, including underpayment for their services, denying them trust, assuming their illegitimacy, or tokenising them.

Instead of engaging in such counterproductive practices, it’s important to recognise that direct experience with the system that you are trying to transform conveys a level of expertise that cannot be taught—it’s an experience that is unique to the person who experiences it, and it’s invaluable in designing effective transformations.

Partnerships can look very different across contexts. However, the process of partnering with system-impacted young people to create policies can be replicated in similar ways across various contexts where there is a genuine commitment to collaborate with system-affected and youth young people in general.

ENGAGEMENT	PARTNERSHIP
Inviting youth to attend ad hoc project-based discussions specific to your policy priorities	Hiring youth as staff, board members, or in other leadership roles to develop policies
Hosting a youth-centred community discussion to gather input on a policy priority	Supporting youth partners to lead and initiate community discussions to gather input on policy priorities
Asking youth to testify about their experience in an adult facility in support of your advocacy (e.g. to raise the minimum age of adult jurisdiction)	Working alongside youth to develop and execute their campaign (e.g. with the goal of raising the minimum age of adult jurisdiction)

# FOSTERING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

## Ayotunde Aboderin

Educationist, advocate for youth and marginalized communities, and writer, Nigeria

## Juliana Makonise

Smith College, USA and Zimbabwe

For more than two decades, there has been an urgent call for key stakeholders to give young people seats at decision-making tables. Although considerable actions have been taken towards meeting this demand, there is still a need to heed the voices of youth on these decision-making platforms and for stakeholders to act on their recommendations. Putting an end to youth tokenism and meaningfully co-creating and co-innovating with youth in development processes is crucial. Youth engagement is a key tool to empower and promote the participation of African youth, especially low-income, rural and unemployed youth, in communal advancement.

Africa's growing youth population has compelled stakeholders at local, national and international levels to rethink how to urgently and deliberately engage youth. Given that young people aged 25 and below constitute over 60% of Africa's population, it is paramount that they actively take part in social, economic and political development processes, bringing in new and fresh perspectives that can influence the ever-changing status quo (Rocca & Schultes, 2020). The Population Reference Bureau (2019) estimates that African youth will constitute 42% of the world's youth by 2030, adding urgency to the question of fostering meaningful youth engagement. Policymakers must thus facilitate intergenerational dialogue and collaboration to

promote the involvement of youth across various demographics. Youth-centric partnerships are a significant step towards the overall betterment of current and future societies.

### Youth Advisory Councils (YACs)

To be effective, youth engagement should encompass the representation, inclusion and prioritisation of youth voices at all levels. Youth advisory councils (YACs) are one great way to drive meaningful youth engagement.

The main goal of YACs is to facilitate the amplification of youth voices on decision-making platforms. Hershkowitz et al. (2009) showed that youth councils create a conducive atmosphere for young people to learn and actively participate in governance processes. YACs give the youth an opportunity to formulate policies, leadership structures and initiatives on their own terms while taking up an advisory role to policymakers across various sectors. Current YACs on international platforms are extremely competitive. For instance, the European Union (EU) Youth Sounding Board (YSB) only accepts fewer than 30 young people globally after every two years. The EU has also started launching national YSBs; other organisations should follow suit and establish more YACs at local and national levels to ensure the voices of more

youth are heard at all levels. Specialised councils such as the West Africa Youth Assembly (WAYA) have helped to encourage youth involvement in regional affairs in addition to more localised groups that push for the inclusion of women or disadvantaged youth in decision-making spaces.

To harness the benefits of councils and guarantee their sustainability, substantial financial investments that support capacity-building and youth-led project implementation must be made (Hershkowitz et al., 2009). Without adequate resources, even the most well-intentioned initiatives can falter. By funding YACs, governments and local communities can support the inclusion of youth in important governance processes. Youth councils create an avenue for youth to exercise their role as empowered and educated global citizens, better equipping them to meaningfully contribute to social, economic and political development. Investing in youth-centric programmes is a necessity, not an option.

In addition, all community stakeholders should be able to harness the power of digital media as a tool for effective youth engagement. Technology presents numerous opportunities to creatively amplify youth voices. Using social media, policymakers can better connect with young people on their own turf, speak

### Key takeaways:

- Fund the establishment of youth advisory councils at local and national levels to promote youth leadership and long-term communal impact.
- Safely leverage digital media to increase the scope of youth engagement.
- Invest in educating all community stakeholders (especially youth in rural areas) on the importance of youth engagement.





their language, engage in conversations that span across generations and bridge some generational gaps. By enabling real-time interaction and continuous feedback channels, the careful use of digital tools can aid transparent and accessible communication. Through digital platforms, youth from different continents can also engage in cross-cultural interactions and learn diverse ways of effectively participating in community advancement. We should, however, aim to tackle the digital divide that exists across geographies and generations and to promote safe and inclusive online spaces. Such mechanisms can ensure that youth voices are heard, valued and acted upon.

As we work towards reimagining youth engagement efforts, investments must be made in training workshops for youth to better understand the importance of their participation in decision-making processes and how they can better forge partnerships with governments. Similarly, governments and community organisations should be aware of how to forge partnerships with youth. There should also be

open invitations for youth from rural communities to participate in such educational initiatives. By learning to identify acts of youth tokenism, young people can avoid being manipulated by other community stakeholders. Where possible, educational institutions can develop youth engagement curricula and offer lectures on topics such as civic participation, digital media and social change. The [UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth](#) (2014) toolkit can be a great starting point on how to formulate an effective training module. Through education, young people can be well-informed about why, how and when to participate in development processes.

Ultimately, meaningful youth engagement can empower and validate the importance of youth involvement in governance processes, thus paving the way for more inclusive and effective decision-making processes. Although African governments have made strides in promoting youth participation, the need for deeper and more intentional involvement of community stakeholders in fostering more meaningful youth engagement still remains.

# POLÍTICA PARA TODOS: BRIDGING THE GAP IN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA

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## Key takeaways:

- Foster collaboration with youth-led organisations and social initiatives—especially those focused on civic education—to ensure that young people are better equipped to engage with and contribute to a democratic society.
- Offer financial support to youth-led organisations to co-create schemes to bring political public institutions and political processes closer to youth.
- Offer internships, mentorship programs, and experiential learning opportunities within your own institutions.
- Support accurate and trustworthy initiatives on social media that can effectively educate and inform young people, countering the spread of false information and enhance youth engagement in political processes.

A 2013 report by La Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales Chile (FLASCO Chile) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) on youth political participation highlighted that, in Latin America, individuals under 30 are less involved in presidential elections compared to those over 30 across the continent. However, the lack of participation among Latin American youth is not due to a reluctance to engage in politics. Latin American youth show a keen interest in politics and democratic values but view the political system as inaccessible, remote, and corrupt (Luminate, 2022). According to research conducted in 16 Latin American countries, only 33% of Latin American youth aged 15-29 trust their national government, which is lower than the 40.1% trust among those aged over 50. Indeed, the number of youth with trust in their national government has been in constant decline since the 2008 economic crisis (OECD, 2020).

As a result, many young people turn away from traditional politics—such as voting, parties, and elections—in favor of alternative forms of political engagement. These include collective action, online activism, and social initiatives. While these methods are already

highly important and efficient, the absence of youth representation in formal political spaces and positions (Berthin & Gilbert-Roberts, 2018) negatively impacts the visibility and progress made towards their causes.

## Understanding Latin American Youth's Behaviours

Engaging Latin American (LA) youth requires understanding their behaviours, culture, and interests, including their passion regarding politics. In recent years, Latin American young people have emerged as leading supporters of causes such as environmental protection, women's rights, LGBTQIAPN+ rights and education. This is evident in the growth of numerous youth-led initiatives on social media, such as *Todos Somos Agua*, *Tocando em Frente*, and *Politize!* which collectively have over 150,000 followers on social media and continue to gain traction.

Apart from being a tool for social change movements, social media is also LA youths' main source of news (Newman et al., 2023), reflecting a notable distrust of traditional TV networks in the region. Youth increasingly rely on social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp

for political information and engagement. Yet, paradoxes emerge. In Brazil, young people rely heavily on these platforms to shape their political beliefs, whereas in Argentina, youth consume news on these platforms but report a lack of trust in them (Luminate, 2022). Thus, it is crucial to support and enhance the presence of trustworthy yet open initiatives on social media that can effectively educate and inform the youth about the politics and causes that interest them. This will make LA young people more likely to engage both in traditional and non-traditional forms of political engagement (Medina & de Guzman, 2023).

## Collaborative Efforts in Youth Engagement

Important flagship initiatives throughout Latin America ensure meaningful youth engagement in a changing political landscape. Organisations such as the Brazilian *Escola Comum* and the Latin American Leadership Academy (LALA) play vital roles by preparing students to discuss politics, empowering them to pursue formal political roles, and increasing representation in politics. “Escola Comum,” for example, helps low-income students enrol in a nine-

month course on Democracy, Economics and Sustainability, Public Policy, and Contemporary Challenges, all taught by professors, activists, and political leaders. Additionally, it provides financial support to students, thereby guaranteeing their presence in the program. Similarly, LALA identifies purpose-driven youth and offers programs that build essential skills while connecting them to a community of changemakers from similar backgrounds.

Another important common thread between these organizations is that *Escola Comum* and LALA are youth-led. This helps students understand and see the actual impact that decisions for youth made by youth can have, showing them that they are also able to make decisions and create impact in their communities.

By empowering students and increasing their representation in political spaces, these organizations help to ensure that diverse perspectives are included in decision-making processes. This is especially important in Latin America, given its significant ethnic and racial plurality. Broader engagement allows for both a

wider as well as a more representative range of ideas and solutions to problems, addressing social needs and concerns more comprehensively. Thus, inclusivity enhances the quality of policies and initiatives, ultimately leading to more effective and equitable governance.

Latin American youth who learn about civic processes are more likely to engage in community service, volunteer work, and advocacy processes. They are also more inclined to vote, participate and engage in decision-making processes with the government (Medina & de Guzman, 2023). Direct exposure to political processes can help demystify governance for young people, build their trust in public institutions, and inspire a new generation of informed and engaged leaders who bridge traditional and alternative politics paving the way for a more dynamic and representative political system.

# EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES FOR INCLUSIVE DECISION-MAKING AND GOVERNANCE

## Saliqa Amin

Children in All Policies (CAP2030) Youth Advisory Board (YAB) Alumna<sup>1</sup>, Pakistan and France

### Key takeaways:

Governments and institutions must:

- Adopt a rights- and sustainable development-based approach when supporting youth civil society organisations, and ensure inclusivity and transparency throughout the process.
- Integrate youth participation mechanisms into long-term institutional strategies through explicit commitments from leaders.
- Allocate a sufficient budget for the development and maintenance of mechanisms for youth participation.
- Create spaces for dialogue involving institutions, youth organisations, young people, policymakers, educators, healthcare providers and community leaders.
- Integrate participation mechanisms into long-term institutional strategies to ensure sustainable youth participation efforts.
- Involve youth in the development of participation mechanisms and their continuous review to enhance their effectiveness and relevance.

[Youth participation](#) in decision-making processes is fundamental for ensuring inclusive governance and policies that cater to the diverse needs and aspirations of an ever-changing society. However, many current mechanisms do not fully engage youth talent, resulting in the underrepresentation and limited participation of young people. Diverse representation allows decision makers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of young people's problems, allowing them to leverage their specific insights to curate effective solutions.

My recommendations are based both on research on the topic and my one-year journey as a member of the [Youth Advisory Board \(YAB\)](#) for [Children in All Policies \(CAP2030\)](#). CAP2030 YAB members represent 16 countries and provide valuable input to policymakers across various domains. Acting as one of the 21 members (aged 13–18) of the CAP2030 YAB taught me first-hand the importance of leveraging the strengths of youth organisations and addressing barriers to their engagement.

When engaging with young people, governments and institutions should adopt a [rights and sustainable development-based](#)

[approach](#) to create an environment where youth rights are protected and promoted. This approach prioritises the vulnerable groups outlined in international conventions such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and highlighted by, for example, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Association for the Development of Protected Areas (ADPA), hence addressing marginalisation through gender, race, creed and disability. This strategy integrates education for all in policies across multiple domains, such as health, social equity and economic inclusion. The strategy also ensures coherence and alignment with the SDGs. Youth advisory boards such as CAP2030 exemplify this approach in action by providing platforms for youth to participate and influence decision-making. Designed inclusively and drawing participants from backgrounds, these boards uphold youth rights to representation, inclusion and consultation on issues affecting their lives, such as combating harmful marketing, climate change and education, and addressing racism's impact on child health.



Additionally, governments and institutions should facilitate the creation and sustainability of youth civil society organisations and enhance the [representation of diverse youth](#) within them. Indeed, it is critical that established institutions offer meaningful assistance to these organisations. Providing resources such as funding, programmes and networks to youth-led and youth-serving organisations as well as services to support the youth activities or projects they undertake is crucial. Furthermore, genuine attempts should be made to engage Indigenous, refugee and rural youth to ensure that these traditionally underrepresented groups are able to have their views heeded and can access support when needed.

CAP2030 engaged youth in the development and design of strategies or mechanisms for young people's participation. Intergenerational dialogue leads actors to design stronger and more effective programmes and approaches to policy design and implementation together. This strengthens the legitimacy and efficiency of the participatory mechanisms implemented while stimulating interest in initiatives from young populations. Moreover, organisations interested in youth engagement can build a trusting and partnership relationship with youth, and the decisions taken will suit the needs and best interests of the youths affected by those decisions.

Tackling issues hindering the engagement of young people means understanding the obstacles they face. Some challenges include how the [digital divide](#) limits access to online participation platforms, the exclusionary design

of platforms that ostracise youths with various disabilities and a lack of information about opportunities available to youth. Young people may also encounter restrictions connected with financial constraints and material resources. To address these difficulties, CAP2030 developed easily accessible, diverse, inclusive and engaging formats such as user-friendly dashboards and facilitated additional safe spaces for specialists and young people to ensure an environment where both parties are mutually learning and engaging thoughtfully.

Participation mechanisms should be transparent, feedback loops should be established back to the youth consulted, and clear rights and responsibilities should be defined. In CAP2030, sustained communication and a willingness to share information inspired trust among diverse stakeholders because they were able to understand the decision-making process. Indeed, it is important that feedback mechanisms include channels by which youth and other stakeholders can make their opinions and concerns heard, hence enhancing accountability. The human rights legal framework of rights and duties provides a model of behaviours that are expected in such feedback processes.

Finally, if institutions want to engage young people, they should ensure that youth are engaged throughout the entire institutional process and allocated sufficient resources for their participation efforts. For example, proper and adequate human, financial, informational and infrastructural resources for youth and

youth-led participatory mechanisms should be provided. Holistically, ensuring support for youth-led activities, staff and mentors to guide young people, information to increase youth awareness and infrastructure to support existing opportunities is critical for promoting youth engagement and outputs. Furthermore, sustaining youth engagement and encouraging their inputs in institutions can take the form of, for example, providing them with skill development training or the opportunity for them to organise training and develop workshops. These development opportunities are pivotal because they can help youth lead change and be involved in decision-making processes.

#### Footnote

1. CAP2030 is an international initiative focused on improving children's health and well-being through policy advocacy, research and collaboration. Based at the Institute for Global Health at University College London (UCL), it works with scientists, policymakers and youth to address urgent global issues like climate change, harmful commercial marketing and social inequities, ensuring children's rights are central to decision-making processes.

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL FUTURE: THINKING ACROSS GENDER, GENERATIONS, DISCIPLINES, AND BORDERS

## Ern Chern Khor

Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), Republic of Korea (South Korea)

### Key takeaways:

- Examining diverse experiences with technology across different social groups and generations is critical to assessing the impact of digital technology and envisioning its future implications.
- Ensuring that digital technology development promotes social equality requires evidence-based efforts, developed in particular through global partnerships promoting active youth engagement.
- Engaging in intergenerational dialogue helps both the young and older generations understand evolving social changes and better prepare for future digital developments.

As a late millennial, I have witnessed the rise of the mobile internet and some of its impacts on society. During my teenage years, Facebook was becoming popular. My exposure to social media later sparked my academic interest in analysing these platforms to explore the disparities experienced by different social groups online. I believe such analysis offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of social interaction. Indeed, the technology we grow up with shapes how we feel about and perceive its impacts today—whether as users, developers, researchers or entrepreneurs. Today, digital technology continues to impact and transform many aspects of our lives, and the rapid pace of technological change makes understanding its impacts across generations ever more crucial.

**Meaningful youth engagement** in shaping the digital future involves including young people in discussions about the potential impacts of technology, both positive and negative. These discussions must include young people of different genders, age groups, and social classes across borders, and particularly, young people from disadvantaged groups. At the KAIST Aging and Technology Policy Lab, our work critically examines how technological advancements

affect different social groups. Our research has highlighted two key lessons. First, adopting evidence-based thinking is crucial. In the digital age, alongside traditional government and institutional data, vast amounts of data are generated from sources such as social media or smart sensors. However, not all data is evidence. Distinguishing useful data from noise and then analyzing and interpreting it appropriately, especially using computational methods to handle new forms of data, is crucial for evidence-based discussions.

Second, it is important to consider social contexts, acknowledging that our social environments shape our personal experiences and, consequently, our opinions. When encouraging collaborative discussions, we need to solicit and embrace the experiences of diverse groups. Special attention should be given to the perspectives of disadvantaged groups, such as older adults, women, the underprivileged, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and those from the Global South, as well as the intersections of these factors. Understanding and centring these historically marginalized perspectives can foster better and more inclusive technology design and policy.

For younger generations facing both rapid technological advancements and sustainability challenges, these lessons are critical for the future development of technologies. Addressing these challenges requires more than just individual effort; young people need to collaborate to manage the fast pace of change effectively. Below, I describe two promising collaborative efforts that I have been involved in and the best practices learned for engaging youth in the digital future.

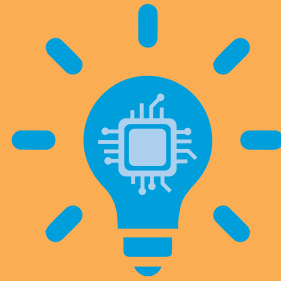
**Gender equality:** As outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5), gender equality is a complex issue that cannot be resolved through isolated, short-term efforts. Achieving SDG5 relies heavily on multilateral collaborations. Our lab co-leads the Research Coalition of [EQUALS](#), a Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, initiated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). EQUALS includes three coalitions—devoted to access, skills and leadership, respectively—that focus on projects and initiatives to improve gender equality in technology. The [Research Coalition](#), in particular, emphasises the importance of evidence-based actions, and the collection and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data.

The effectiveness of the EQUALS Partnership's projects and initiatives is closely linked to understanding the interplay between gender, generations and technology. Gender awareness and responsiveness evolve over generations, and each generation interacts with technology differently. Because their perspectives on gender equality in technology can vary widely, youth engagement in these discussions is fundamental. Young people should be afforded more opportunities to actively engage in collaborative efforts to contribute to more inclusive technological development.

**Intergenerational dialogue:** In my experience as part of the first cohort of Global Youth Leaders at the World Internet Conference, I participated in an intergenerational panel discussion alongside leading experts and noticed interesting dynamics between the generations. Young people saw their achievements as lacking in comparison to those of previous generations all the while those same older experts expressed strong faith in the potential of youth to lead the future of technology development. To ensure that youth value their contributions as much as these experienced experts, young people need to be afforded meaningful participation opportunities where their views are centred and valued. Everyone, particularly older generations and those in power, need to support youth by recognising their value and the importance of their work in shaping the future.

In societies in which decision-makers are predominantly older, acknowledging and counteracting age-related power imbalances is important for intergenerational understanding. Such interactions help young people have faith in their current and future contributions to society, whilst making space for them to learn from older generations, too. Furthermore, to engage meaningfully with younger people, older generations should understand the evolving characteristics of younger cohorts and the specific impact of technologies on their social environments.

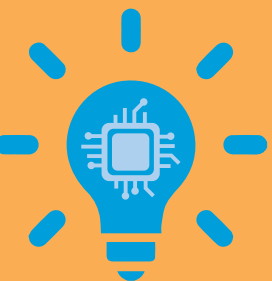
In summary, youth engagement is essential for addressing social issues and global challenges related to technology, gender, and generations. To maximise the leadership potential of young people, it is important to ensure that youth are meaningfully included and that conversations always include diverse perspectives as well as critical understandings of technology and information. Finally, it is crucial that we remain actively engaged in collaborative efforts to equitably advance technological developments across gender, generations, disciplines and borders.



# 2

## TRANSFORMING

**Transforming** existing structures—and the world at large—entails radical engagement with youth as partners, empowering intergenerational feminist partnerships, global networked classrooms, and inclusive governance processes, focusing on empowering young women and girls from the Global Majority, enhancing youth involvement in peace and professional arenas, and redefining youth participation in policymaking from consultation to co-creation.





# INTERGENERATIONAL FEMINIST PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

## Natasha Harris-Harb

United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), Canada and Lebanon

I spent my teenage years organizing for change in my school and community, sitting on youth advisory groups and participating in youth advocacy programmes. I, along with my peers, were tokenized, infantilized, told we were not experienced enough, and directed what to say on stages by others.

For the majority of my twenties, I have worked with and for the United Nations trying to change the system that I experienced (and continue to experience) as a young activist. My diverse experiences have cemented my core belief: we will only achieve sustainable development by funding, partnering with, and trusting the leadership of young feminists.

Now, I am 27 years old and a staff member in UNICEF leading youth movements and feminist leadership for the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). I am proud to say that UNGEI is a feminist [intergenerational partnership](#) working to advance gender equality in and through education. However, becoming truly intergenerational was not a linear process and still involves constant unlearning and relearning, thinking creatively, and challenging existing power structures. With determination,

patience, and collaboration, we are showing that it is possible to shift power to young people and to change the way the system works.

I do not take working for UNICEF or UNGEI for granted. I am a young person in a system that traditionally works *for* young people but not always *with* us in a meaningful way. This is no one person's fault. It is the result of the structures that the system is built on. This being said, it is possible to transform these structures for the [United Nations](#) to meaningfully partner with young people in all of their diversity. Join me, join us in making this a reality.

### Words and Actions Matter

The ways young people are communicated with can set the foundation for a truly feminist, equitable working relationship (or not). And the language used matters. For example, throughout the organization, UNGEI no longer uses the term “youth engagement” and instead speaks of advancing a “meaningful intergenerational partnership” or about “young feminist leadership”. Shifting from “engaging” to “partnering” with youth-led organizations and young people in all of their diversity sets a basis for mutual respect. Similarly, whilst “capacity

building” is often used to speak about youth, “capacity strengthening” is more appropriate; saying “strengthening” honours young people's existing capacities.

To adults, think about how you partner with adult-led NGOs, UN agencies, or member states. What are the key components that guide these partnerships? Is it mutual respect? Co-creation from the beginning of the project? Trust? You most likely view your adult partners as equals, with expertise and knowledge that will contribute to your collective mission. Now think about how you partner and communicate with youth-led organizations and young people. Are there similarities or differences? Do you call your adult-led partners “superstars”? Why or why not? Reflect on your responses and ask yourself what is underpinning these differences and what it will take to change this.

### Partnerships Cannot be Meaningful Without Funding

Young feminist-led organizations and activists are under-resourced and yet continue to make impactful change through their work. They must be provided funding for their time and expertise. As policy, we at UNGEI always offer stipends for

### Key takeaways:

- Fund young feminist-led organizations and hire young people for paid roles.
- Shift from engagement to partnerships with young people, based on mutual respect at the core.
- Centre and implement well-being arrangements in your work with young feminists.



young feminists who join working groups, work on campaigns, create digital content, or speak in a session. By thinking outside of the box, and through extensive research, we came across different transfer modalities for getting funds to young feminists. We always encourage partners to fund young feminists for their time and have influenced UN agencies as well as nonprofit organizations to do so. We are also intentional in providing younger colleagues paid positions and opportunities. Recently, we developed [Education Shifts Power](#), a participatory funding process that is resourcing 14 young feminist-led organizations working to advance gender equality in and through education. The grant-making process was designed by an intergenerational group of partners. The goal is for this to become a revolving fund through which the UNGEI partnership can provide flexible and sustainable funding to our [young feminist-led organization partners](#).

### Support the Well-being of Young Feminist Partners

Young feminists experience a high rate of burnout. To combat this, it is essential to support their mental health and well-being when partnering with them. Depending on the context, this can include, for example, centring mindfulness, providing time for breaks, sharing resources, and more. UNGEI, for one, is

piloting a programme where our young feminist partners have funded access to mental health practitioners. We have done this for individual young feminists that we work with, and we are now refining the model with the hope that it can be scaled and replicated. The hope is that this model will enable all of the young feminists that we work with to access free mental health services, including one-on-one counselling and group sessions.

This is not an extensive list of recommendations but rather represents a number of powerful starting points for working to create better intergenerational partnerships for sustainable change. Whilst this piece has focused on international-level recommendations, learnings can equally be applied at national and local levels. Let's go beyond youth advisory councils and young people on panels. Let's work together to achieve our collective goals.

# GLOBAL NETWORKED CLASSROOMS: BUILDING ETHICAL RELATIONS THROUGH YOUTH POLICY DELIBERATIONS

**Lynette Shultz**

University of Alberta, Canada

**Carrie Karsgaard**

Cape Breton University, Canada

## Key takeaways:

- Youth, as informed policy actors, become powerful protectors of land and communities—citizens of today, not just future citizens.
- For urgent yet polarizing issues such as climate change, ethical relationality–focused policy deliberations provide the necessary relationships to work for change through collaborative coalitions of purpose.
- Working on global issues requires attention to building deep relations of land and community to understand and engage with people in other places.

## Introduction

As adults working with youth on climate change issues, we often reflect on how to position youth as authentic policy actors and activists. Students are educated as citizens of the future through hyper-individualistic and work-focused schooling, but they are not positioned as present community members holding agency. In our work with several global networked classrooms, we have developed effective ways to engage youth in collaborative research, developing and presenting policy papers, and taking informed policy action (Gladwin et al., 2022; Karsgaard et al., 2022). Following each of these projects, we heard directly from youth and teachers via focus groups and interviews about how these global collaborations supported deeper learning, solidarity-building, and meaningful contributions to climate policy. We have learned that ethical relationality is central to understanding and acting on climate change.

## Deliberative Design and a Pedagogy of Ethical Relations

The challenge in any global project is the pull toward universalism that makes so much of the world’s knowledge invisible—including

the knowledges of marginalized youth. What distinguishes our global classroom design from other online engagement is our pedagogical approach based on ethical relations, which supports youth to know their own locales and communities as they make decisions together, all while accounting for how they are unevenly positioned in relation to one another.

As we contemplated models of participation such as Hart’s (1992) enduring “Ladder of Participation,” it was clear that the urgency of climate crises demanded deep changes that might transform the systems that have created the climate crises—and quickly. We needed to expand the view of activists beyond the typical lens of a modern, liberal subject and a heroic individual actor. To do so, we turned to people and communities grounded in land protection for millennia. Our climate pedagogy emerged from the teachings of Indigenous knowledge holders and scholars on Turtle Island (North America), such as Lear (2006), Ermine (2007), and Donald (2009), who invite us to consider the entangled relationships with the land or biosphere we inhabit, the people indigenous to these lands, immigrants and settlers, and the histories of colonialism and colonizing relations.

This approach sought to support and strengthen their collective ability to respond effectively and ethically to climate crises.

Our model for engaging youth (see Figure 2) addresses the gaps in understanding how youth learn to be engaged. It focuses on deliberations among youth and the adults/teachers they work with; expert community members, elders, and knowledge holders who also act as land and cultural protectors; and the land itself.

## How Does the Global Networked Classroom Work?

Through the global networked classrooms, we collaboratively built an online learning community to hold our ideas, creations, and conflicts, and to recommend collaboratively co-designed positive climate actions to policymakers. Grounded in ethical relationality, the global classroom assembles youth and teachers in multiple countries (12–27 schools) and connects schools using online tools over a period of 8–9 months.

First, students conduct research on local realities—for instance, through photo documentation of their lived environment and



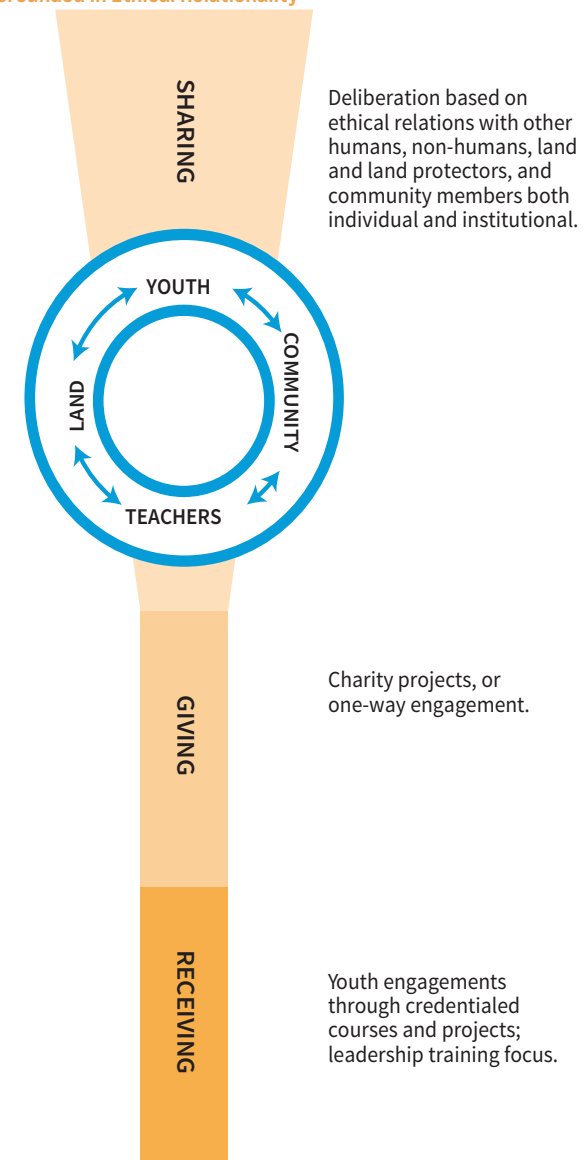
interviews with elders. Then, through relational pedagogies of collaboration and deliberation, they share what they have learned. Beginning with country-based deliberation, students later conduct bilateral collaborations with differently situated schools (e.g., Global North/South, different climate contexts), multilateral collaborations among similarly situated schools, and, finally, global “town halls,” where they present research and generate policy knowledge. Each peer engagement is anchored in ethical relations that encompass the biosphere, people within the community, and the multi-biospheric and multi-national network of youth engaged in the project. This ethical framing shifts the content and the processes of the global networked classroom, as dialogue generates further inquiry and ongoing deliberation, spreading from the online classroom to informal chat groups.

The projects culminated in presentations and policy papers shared at policy venues, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United

Nations Conference of Parties (COP), and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and others were disseminated within local policy circles.

In the face of polarizing issues such as climate change, where public dialogue is curtailed through the influence of fossil fuel interests, deliberation among differently positioned youth in dialogue with their schools, communities, and lands holds the potential to shift power relations and create policy change by building sustainable and collaborative coalitions of purpose. The youth, as informed policy actors, will be more readily able to identify the influence of state and private interests working to limit climate change policies and can act to protect their lands and communities.

**Figure 2**  
Youth Participation Grounded in Ethical Relationality



Source: Adapted with permission from Karsgaard et al., 2022.

# CREATING SPACE FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM THE GLOBAL MAJORITY IN GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

## Yasmina Benslimane

Politics4Her, Morocco

### Key takeaways:

- Dismantle the financial and visa barriers that significantly limit the participation of young women and girls from the Global South in governance processes by providing funding, capacity-building and mentorship.
- Include global majority young women and girls in decision-making processes, particularly on issues that disproportionately impact them, such as forced displacement, conflict, the climate crisis and gender-based violence.
- Relocate high-level UN events to more accessible locations.
- End tokenization by meaningfully engaging global majority young women and girls as experts.
- Implement quotas that recognise that global majority young women and girls are not a homogeneous group to ensure their inclusion and bring diverse perspectives to decision-making processes.

As the world prepares for the United Nations Summit of the Future, the discussion around meaningful youth engagement in governance processes must include the voices of young women and girls, particularly from the [global majority](#). All those engaged in governance should be appalled by the current state of women's rights globally. Examples of the dire situation facing women abound: Afghanistan's new law [mandating face coverings](#) for women is completely erasing them from public life; in Sudan, 6.7 million people are at risk of [gender-based violence](#); the dire humanitarian crisis for Palestinians in Gaza, including the severe shortages of medical supplies, is disproportionately affecting women and girls, especially impacting their [sexual and reproductive health rights \(SRHR\)](#); and, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, violence has resulted in at least 531 victims of [conflict-related sexual violence](#) from August 2023 to June 2024 alone.

Using a feminist intersectional lens, which analyses how various forms of discrimination, such as those based on race, gender, class and sexuality, intersect and compound to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege, it is clear that the unique challenges faced

by young women and girls can be addressed only through their meaningful inclusion in governance processes. Their experiences and perspectives are essential for creating policies that genuinely address the needs of the most vulnerable populations. However, they are often completely removed from the centres of decision-making, meaning that their voices are not heard as they should be.

Despite their critical role in social justice movements, year after year, we witness the same tokenisation of young women and girls: they are invited to participate in governance processes, but their involvement is often limited, and their invitation often remains a symbolic gesture. Global majority women and girls continue to face significant barriers to engaging in formal governance processes, including funding restrictions, visa apartheid, and various forms of gender-based violence. These practices undermine meaningful youth engagement, as the inputs of young women and girls are either not taken seriously or not truly integrated into policies on the few occasions when they can participate. We cannot afford another high-level event filled with empty promises while our leaders continue to fail us.

The need for action is urgent, and the time for action is now. We will not achieve a better world by leaving global majority young women and girls behind. To build a just and sustainable future, we must create spaces for their meaningful, non-tokenistic participation in governance.

**Financial resources:** Many young feminist activists, especially from the Global South, cannot afford to travel and attend international conferences without receiving funding. The cost of attending these events, including flights, accommodation, visa fees, and daily stipends, far exceeds any "regular" person's financial capacity. Sometimes, these costs can total over US\$5,000, a sum that is nearly 10 times the annual income of individuals in many low-income countries, underscoring the vast financial barriers to participation. This financial exclusion silences vital voices and perpetuates a cycle of inequality, elitism and hypocrisy in global governance processes. This exclusion is even further compounded by visa apartheid, in which visa regulations and mobility restrictions, particularly in Global North countries, limit access to those from the Global South. It is unjust that colonial legacies continue to impact young women and girls

from the Global South. In addition, navigating the bureaucracy and complexities of obtaining a UN badge through an ECOSOC-accredited organisation makes participation even less accessible and perpetuates the exclusion of the most necessary voices. Despite these known challenges, invitations are often sent out late, leaving insufficient time to prepare. UN agencies perpetuated such practices even when the 2023 theme of the UN Women’s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) was “young women and girls in all their diversity”.

**Violence, conflict and climate crisis:** Gender-based violence, rooted in systemic gender inequality, undermines young women and girls’ safety, confidence and ability to participate in public life. Indeed, they often face harassment, assault and other forms of violence that not only endanger their lives but also discourage their involvement in social justice movements. Moreover, the additional threat of violence in conflict zones, which disproportionately affects global majority women and girls, further negatively influences young women and girls’ ability to engage in activism and advocacy. In [countries experiencing fragility, conflict and violence \(FCV\)](#), girls are 2.5 times more likely to

be out of school than boys, and at the secondary level, are 90% more likely to be out of school. Conflict, war and environmental disasters often result in the displacement of communities, with young women and girls facing [heightened risks of violations of their human rights, which adds another](#) layer of complexity to their exclusion from governance processes; in refugee camps and displaced communities, they are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, exploitation and lack of access to education and health care. Additionally, the climate crisis disproportionately affects the global majority. Yet, as much as these realities often render the participation of global majority young women and girls particularly difficult, their experiences at the frontlines of multiple crises make their voices particularly critical in finding solutions that address these issues. These harsh realities underscore the need for more inclusive governance processes.

**UN events:** Relocating high-level UN events away from expensive Global North countries with restrictive visa policies is one practical step towards inclusivity. Holding these events in more accessible locations with less restrictive visa policies and lower travel costs would

allow greater participation from historically marginalized groups, including young women and girls from the global majority. This shift would not only enhance inclusivity but also democratize global governance processes. By making it easier for young women and girls from the global majority to attend and contribute to these events, we can ensure that their perspectives are included in decision-making processes, leading to more equitable and effective policies.

Genuine involvement of global-majority young women and girls requires providing them with the resources to access platforms to speak, listening to and valuing their perspectives, amplifying their perspectives and solutions, and ensuring that their contributions lead to tangible policy changes.

*The need for action is urgent, and the time for action is now.*

# STRENGTHENING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE PROCESSES: WHAT WE KNOW AND STEPS FORWARD

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**Asli Ozcelik**

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## Key takeaways:

- Power-holders need to challenge their own stereotypes and invest time in developing relationships of trust and mutual respect with youth, e.g. through intergenerational dialogues, solidarity-building, and co-creation.
- Develop youth capacities, e.g. through mentoring by people with extensive experience, or establishing spaces for youth to learn from each other.
- Incorporating youth-responsive approaches, and youth voices and needs in policy, programming and research.
- Address the systemic disadvantage, exclusion and marginalisation youth face, e.g. poverty, poor healthcare and inadequate education

## Introduction

Many tend to see young people simply as victims or perpetrators of violence. However, amidst the challenges of violence and struggles to survive, youth in conflict zones and in other violent situations have shown tremendous resilience. They often play an active role in mediating and resolving conflicts and building peace. In our research, we see that youth lead and make significant contributions to initiatives that build social cohesion and trust across different groups, create spaces for youth with diverse backgrounds to work together towards a peaceful world, advocate for human rights and against violence, and heal traumas of conflict-affected communities (Ozcelik et al., 2021).

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has now adopted three resolutions on youth, peace and security (YPS; Resolution 2250 in 2015, 2419 in 2018 and 2535 in 2020) to underscore youth's positive role in conflict and to call for youth participation in political processes, conflict and violence prevention and resolution alongside the promotion of social cohesion and peace. At the heart of the YPS agenda is a commitment to youth inclusion and partnership.

Despite these resolutions, in 2022, the UN secretary-general emphasised that the inclusion of youth in peace and security-related decision-making remains marginal (UNSC, 2022). Our research shows that youth involvement in peace processes continues to be instrumentalised and symbolic, and that youth with disadvantaged and marginalised backgrounds in particular are excluded from decision-making processes (Ozcelik et al., 2021; see also Spalding et al., 2021).

## Challenges

Our participatory research with young peace-builders in Afghanistan, Kenya, Liberia, the Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, and Türkiye, who are either between the ages of 18 and 29 (see UNSC Resolution, 2250) or self-identify as “youth”, helped us identify several challenges that create barriers to youth participation in peace processes, and in decision-making more broadly, at the international, national and local levels (see Ozcelik et al., 2011). The following four challenges were found to be particularly pervasive.

First is the persistent stereotype of youth as troublemakers, violent perpetrators and subjects easily corruptible by political power

holders and “gatekeepers” at local, national and international levels. Young people believe that such stereotyping prevents power-holders from viewing youth as agents of change and hampers the recognition and support for their peace-building efforts, ideas, dreams, and innovations. This is particularly prevalent in hierarchical societies and organisations where intergenerational engagement requires obedience and conformity.

Second, youth are often seen by power-holders as lacking the experience and qualifications to participate in political and peace processes. Youth peace-builders express that their lack of specific skills and knowledge in certain areas is largely due to their exclusion from or lack of capacity development opportunities. Moreover, such deficit labelling overlooks their valuable lived and practical experience (e.g. leading local peace-building initiatives).

Third is the politicisation of inclusion. In many contexts, powerful gatekeepers decide who will be involved in peace and political processes. Selection tends to be determined by whether youth align with the existing political views and agendas of power-holders.

Fourth, socio-economic, political and security barriers hinder youth participation and leadership. Youth have legitimate grievances that include, amongst others, living in poverty and unsafe environments (e.g. where violence and attacks against civil society and on their freedom of expression is rife). Being deprived of necessities, vital social and physical infrastructure, psychosocial support, and a basic sense of security prevents youth from participating in and contributing fully and effectively in decision-making processes. Moreover, when youth lack access to food, decent shelter and a sense of security, they can become dependent on political and military power-holders.

### Actions for International Organisations and Governments

First, the **mindsets of power-holders** in relation to how they perceive youth and their experiences, knowledge, language, values and behaviours need to shift. Power-holders need to challenge their stereotypes and invest time in developing relationships of trust and mutual respect with youth. This can be done through capacity-development initiatives that focus on bringing youth and power-holders together to engage in intergenerational dialogues, solidarity-building, mutual learning, co-creation and knowledge sharing.

Second is the need to **develop the capacities of youth**. An effective way for youth to gain first-hand knowledge and expertise is through mentorship by people with extensive experience

in the field. Some ways to implement mentorship include incorporating youth into mediation and technical assistance teams in peace processes and partnering with youth-led organisations to support their capacity development. Other approaches to facilitate youth's capacity development include establishing easily accessible learning platforms and spaces for youth to learn from each other and work together.

Third is incorporating **youth-responsive approaches** and youth voices and needs (e.g. trauma/mental health) in policy, programming and research to ensure that youth are offered targeted support and are viewed and treated as equal partners. For this, a place-based youth-sensitive conflict analysis should be done to understand youths' priorities, needs and aspirations as well as the reality on the ground that affects youth.

Fourth is the urgent need to address the **disadvantage, exclusion and marginalisation** youth face. Solutions include addressing poverty, poor healthcare and inadequate education provision, creating safe and secure environments for youth and protecting the human rights and dignity of all.



# MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

## Noelia Méndez Santolaria

IAFFE Young Scholars Committee Member,  
Argentina

## Antonella Belén Gervagi

IAFFE Young Scholars Committee Member,  
Argentina

### Key takeaways:

- Open a special committee for young scholars within your organization.
- Recognize the dedicated work of members in specialized youth committees.
- Mobilize the interest and dedication of mid-career and senior generations and institutions to support young people and youth committees in your organization.
- Organize schools, as well as other formative and mentoring opportunities, to introduce newer generations to your field, and to foster bonds and networks worldwide and across generations.
- Appreciate and honour the fact that engaging young scholars in your association fundamentally improves your work, profession, and field.

The International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) was established in the USA in the early nineties in response to the need and desire of its founding members to build an active, non-sexist professional organization for feminists in economics. In 1995, the association launched the first edition of its award-winning [Feminist Economics Journal](#). Since then, the IAFFE has become a worldwide network of scholars, advocates, policymakers, and experts united in the goal of promoting a feminist view in economic studies and gender-transformative policy evaluations. The association now provides an intellectual home for more than 800 members from 90 countries, the *Feminist Economics Journal* has launched its 30th volume and, in July 2024, the IAFFE celebrated one of the biggest feminist economist gatherings at its 32nd annual conference in Rome.

The IAFFE runs thanks to a small but vital [staff](#) that takes care of the day-to-day running the organization and supports the presidents and board of directors. Most of the work is done thanks to the volunteer work of members who organize themselves into different committees, each of which handles different responsibilities encompassing questions of governance, membership, communication, publications, archives, and more. The IAFFE is run by these membership-based committees, as well by as

its Board. The committees are organized by the IAFFE members themselves. Once members identify an issue, they organize a committee or working group to address the needs they have identified. The bulk of activity in the IAFFE is driven by these ad-hoc committees. Some are temporary, existing until an issue is seen as addressed, whilst others become regular ongoing committees.

Indeed, in the self-organizing spirit of the IAFFE, some years ago, the Young Scholars Committee (YSC) was created by a number of women in academia and advocacy, and it is now a regular ongoing committee. The creation of the YSC inaugurated a process to more formally include new generations in the IAFFE and to integrate their views in the organization's activities and decision-making processes.

Today, the YSC mainstreams young scholars' voices in various IAFFE committees through a liaison system. The YSC also promotes different initiatives, such as its Mentorship Program, online events specially designed for young scholars, and a compilation of academic programmes where young academics can specialize in and study feminist economics. The Mentorship Program, one of the key initiatives of the YSC, facilitates the formation of intergenerational professional bonds between

the IAFFE's members. Its first cohort was divided between nine thematic "pods" each consisting of 6–7 mentees and two mentors. On the other hand, YSC members also design two virtual event tracks, available for everyone via the IAFFE's YouTube channels: The [IAFFE Academy](#) attends to young scholars' specific needs and seeks to develop their careers. [Feminist Economics 101](#) seeks to introduce new generations to the key figures and minds contributing to feminist economics. The YSC also compiles and maintains the [Academic Programs Specialising in Feminist Economics](#) list, which compiles specialist feminist economic programs and courses. This list is available online via the new IAFFE website thanks to the initiative of the YSC. They hoped to create a reference point for those interested in finding an academic offering that would allow them to continue their training in the field of feminist economics. Hopefully, this list will constitute a starting point for the eventual creation of a wider network of feminist economics programmes.

Importantly, encouraging the induction of new generations to feminist economics is an interest shared by the leadership and senior generations of the organization. As such, efforts to engage young people are also accompanied and nurtured by institutional initiatives. In conjunction with encouraging young people's

engagement with the IAFFE, these initiatives are dedicated to promoting an ever-more inclusive expansion of the IAFFE’s membership to include academics, activists, and policymakers from different regions of the world at different ages and career stages. One important initiative to promote the inclusion of young and diverse people in the IAFFE is the IAFFE School of Feminist Economics, which has been running since 2023. Each year, the IAFFE School—funded by grants raised by the IAFFE—precedes the IAFFE’s annual conference. It is run by volunteer facilitators whose expenses are paid. Students are selected against criteria determined by the School committee and according to stipulations from the grants.

The IAFFE School subverts typical pedagogical dynamics—i.e. the idea of a professor unidirectionally imparting knowledge to students—and encourages collaborative, peer-to-peer activities and open dialogues between junior and senior scholars. In addition to discussing introductory concepts regarding the discipline of feminist economics, the collective shares life, work, and activism experiences, and possible feminist futures are imagined together as a collective, too.

Students have attested that the School provided an experience and teaching that were lacking in traditional academic programmes and which felt more relevant to their lived experiences, too. Students join from throughout the world, and participants have attested that connecting globally allowed them to consider points of view and solutions to problems that might not have been otherwise considered.

In order to build a sustainable network of engaged feminist scholars, all IAFFE School alumni were offered free membership to the IAFFE for one year. This has helped bring the organization to people new to feminist economics and allowed them to take part in its organizing committees.

**Figure 3**  
IAFFE 32nd Conference Poster



Source: IAFFE, with permission.

## IAFFE 32nd Conference

ONLINE  
&  
ROME, ITALY  
1-2, JULY, 2024



# FROM CONSULTATION TO CO-CREATION: REDEFINING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING

## Minahir Shahid

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*“Youth should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace”*

Kofi Annan.

This article proposes a shift from consultation to co-creation, emphasising the benefits of this approach regarding the creation of effective and inclusive policies.

### Understanding the Shift from Consultation to Co-Creation

Consultation typically involves soliciting opinions and feedback from youth, without necessarily incorporating their views into the final policy decisions they were consulted about. Co-creation, on the other hand, entails the active involvement of youth in all stages of policy development, from ideation to implementation. This approach shifts the power dynamics between public and policymakers, allowing young people to be equal partners in the decision-making process.

Consultation often results in tokenism, in which youth input is solicited but not genuinely

considered. This leads to policies that may not fully address the needs of young people. Co-creation, however, ensures that policies are more democratic, innovative, and applicable to youth and their needs, as they are developed with direct input from those they are meant to serve (Checkoway, 2011).

### Benefits of Co-Creation in Policymaking

Co-creation fosters a sense of ownership and commitment among youth. When young people are actively involved in policymaking, they are likely to support and advocate for the policies they helped create. This increased ownership can lead to the better implementation and increased sustainability of policies. Policies developed in collaboration with youth are also likely to address their actual needs and circumstances. Co-created policies reflect the realities of young people’s lives—as defined by youth themselves—making them more relevant and effective than uninformed policies (Hart, 1992). Youth can also bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to policy discussions. Their involvement can lead to creative approaches that might not otherwise emerge in traditional policymaking processes, from

which they have traditionally been excluded. This diversity of thought is crucial for addressing complex societal challenges (UNDP, 2013).

### Successful Examples of Co-Creation with Youth

The UN Youth Delegate Program allows youth delegates to participate in UN processes, providing a platform via which young people can contribute to global policy discussions. Similarly, the European Youth Forum engages young people in policymaking at the European level, ensuring that their voices are heard in the development of EU policies. New Zealand’s Youth Parliament allows young people to propose and debate legislation, giving them a direct role in the policymaking process. In Kenya, youth were actively involved in reviewing and updating the national youth policy, ensuring that their perspectives were integrated into the final document (Sikenyi, 2017). In Brazil, participatory budgeting in cities such as Porto Alegre involves young people in determining budget allocations. This process empowers youth to influence local governance decisions directly. Similarly, Youth Councils in Nordic countries play a significant role in local

### Key takeaways:

- Policymakers, institutions, and youth organisations must embrace co-creation with young people as a standard practice in policymaking.
- This shift to co-creation requires commitment, resources, and a willingness to involve young people as equal partners in governance structures and systems. Policymakers must ensure adequate funding is provided for these processes.

policymaking by providing a formal mechanism for youth participation (Bessant, 2004).

While working on the development of Youth Policy in Pakistan, I was a youth representative involved in a genuine co-creation process. This initiative succeeded due to inclusive representation, equal partnership, and robust capacity-building, which empowered diverse youth to contribute meaningfully. A continuous feedback loop ensured that our input shaped the final policy, fostering ownership and advocacy. Despite challenges, such as resistance on the part of traditional policymakers and logistical hurdles, the process demonstrated the power of co-creation. When youth are respected as equal partners, outcomes are reflective, robust, and effective in addressing the community's needs.

### Steps in Implementing Co-Creation in Policymaking

To ensure diverse youth representation, inclusive frameworks are essential. These frameworks must prioritise the participation of marginalised groups to ensure that all voices are heard. Inclusivity is crucial in creating policies that are equitable and just. Training and resources are also needed to empower

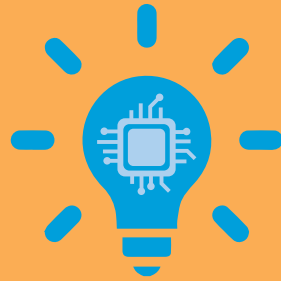
youth to participate effectively in policymaking. Mentorship and partnership programs with experienced policymakers can at least provide young people with the skills and knowledge required for meaningful participation in existing systems (Wong et al., 2010). Political will and commitment are necessary to institutionalise co-creation. In more concrete terms, policy reforms and institutional changes should be implemented to ensure co-creation, making it standard practice in policymaking processes (Lansdown, 2011).

### Challenges and Solutions

Potential challenges include resistance on the part of traditional policymakers, a lack of resources, and cultural barriers between youth and prior generations. These obstacles can hinder the effective implementation of co-creation in policymaking. In the face of these challenges, advocacy and awareness campaigns can help demonstrate the benefits of co-creation. Pilot projects can showcase successful examples and build momentum for broader adoption. Additionally, measuring and demonstrating the impact of co-created policies can provide evidence of their effectiveness, encouraging more policymakers to embrace this approach

(Hart, 1992). The long-term impact of co-created policies can transform society and governance, leading to democratic, equitable, and sustainable outcomes. By redefining youth participation through co-creation, we can create a future in which young people are not merely consulted but, rather, active co-creators of the world they will inherit and are already actively shaping.

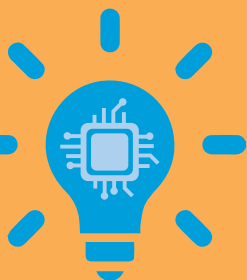
*When youth are respected as equal partners, outcomes are reflective, robust, and effective in addressing the community's needs.*



# 3

## REORDERING

Reordering existing structures and ways of working asks who is not at the table, and also works to centre those at the margins. This section therefore emphasises the importance of representation, integrating relevant Indigenous values into Indigenous youth participation, ensuring meaningful engagement with the Global South in governance processes, challenging the deployment of so-called neutrality as a tool of oppression, addressing systemic imbalances in education, and encouraging youth to redefine success beyond GDP.



# THE FAIR INTERNSHIP INITIATIVE: WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS?

## Emediong Akpabio

The Fair Internship Initiative, Africa Regional  
Coordinator, Nigeria

## Matteo de Simone

The Fair Internship Initiative, Co-Founder,  
Italy

### Key takeaways:

The FII has developed a number of [key recommendations](#) to improve the UN Secretariat internship program based on comparative assessments of existing good practices in the UN system and feedback provided by UN interns, including:

- The **introduction of a stipend scheme** should be a high priority for the UN Secretariat. To have a truly transformative impact on diversity and equal opportunities, the amount set should be sufficient to cover all reasonably incurred living expenses at a given duty station.

- **Remote working should not be used as a “silver bullet” to address the underrepresentation** of interns from the Global South because they are the ones most likely to suffer from the digital divide. Moreover, performing an internship remotely should be a free decision and not dictated by financial constraints. For this reason, **remote interns should be provided with a stipend according to the same criteria applied to in-person interns.**

Until 2015, internships across the United Nations (UN) system had been generally unpaid, resulting in young people from the Global South being underrepresented in the UN compared with their peers in advanced economies. In 2015, the [Fair Internship Initiative](#) (FII) took up the mission of advocating for internship reforms. Since then, this global initiative has been tirelessly working to demonstrate how unpaid UN internship policies discriminate against underprivileged young people, and to bring about policy change to ensure meaningful youth engagement with and within the UN.

Nine years later, ground-breaking reforms have been achieved in most UN agencies, funds and programs. However, because of the persisting discriminatory nature of the organization’s internship policy, the ensemble of interns in the UN Secretariat is in no way representative of global demographics, and pursuing a UN internship in the Secretariat remains elusive for many prospective candidates.

### The Demand For Representation And Fairness

A deep dive into the latest [UN Secretary General’s Report on the composition of the Secretariat \(A/77/578\)](#) reveals that, between 2020 and 2021, there were 3,904 interns in the

UN Secretariat.<sup>1</sup> This report shows a continued geographical divide, with interns from across the Global South not only being consistently underrepresented but also decreasing in number compared with the previous biennium. This has affected mainly interns from Africa (10.5% of all UN Secretariat interns in 2020–21), the Caribbean and Latin America (7.7%), and Eastern Europe (3.9%). Moreover, the number of interns from Western Europe, North America, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand increased to 47.8%. This reveals the continuing and deepening inequality of opportunities between individuals from the Global South and those from the Global North.

Among all Secretariat interns, a quarter came from only two countries (China and the USA), whereas half came from only seven countries. In terms of the income levels of interns, the proportion of interns from high- and upper middle-income countries increased, reaching 53.2% and 27.9%, respectively, from 52% and 27.7%, respectively, in 2018–19. The percentage of interns from lower middle- and low-income countries decreased to 16.7% and 2.1%, respectively, compared with the initial 17.4% and 2.8%, respectively, from 2018 to 2019.

## 10 Years Later, Still Unpaid

UN internships have undergone several reforms in the past few years, with organizations such as the WHO, UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN Women, and others introducing stipends for their interns. In addition to the introduction of stipends, among the best reforms are those of travel and relocation support, improved recruitment transparency and onboarding processes, and the introduction of annual and sick leave.

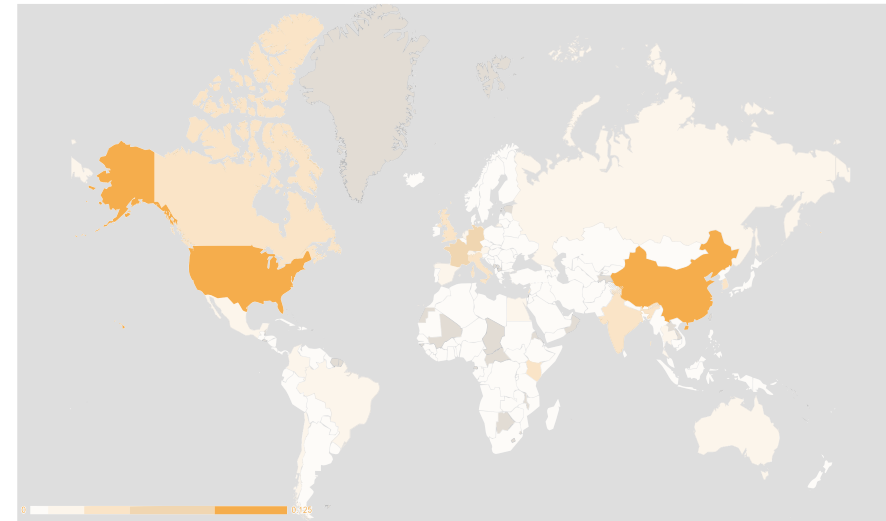
These achievements are a result of years of vigorous advocacy by several parties, including the FII, UN interns, and young activists with UN member states and UN administrations as well as a result of the media and academia's attention to this issue.

However, more still needs to be done. The FII's work in advancing fair internships and meaningful youth engagement in the UN Secretariat reached a critical milestone in April 2023 with the adoption of Resolution 77/278 on Human Resources Management by the UN General Assembly. Under paragraph 52, this resolution explicitly requests that the UN Secretary General reform the Secretariat internship program and explore modalities to financially support UN interns. The UN Secretariat is requested to report back to the General Assembly in March 2025.

This landmark decision may lead to the long-awaited institutional reform of internship programs across the UN. Regretfully, the UN Secretariat has so far failed to hold an inclusive and genuine consultation with representatives of young people on the reform of its internship program, having instead developed a proposal behind closed doors. As of yet, no youth representative is known to have contributed to this proposal. If so, this means it will not have been designed by or even with young people and, hence, may fall short of the expectations and needs of young people from the Global South and from low-income backgrounds in particular.

**Figure 4**

**Heatmap of Intern Nationalities at the UN Secretariat, 2020-21**



Source: Authors

### Footnote

1. The UN Secretariat is one of the main organs of the UN, which is mandated to perform the day-to-day work of the UN. It includes a number of Offices and Departments, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), of Peace Operations (DPO), of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), UN regional commissions, and so forth. However, it does not include funds and programmes (such as UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, etc.) nor specialized agencies (such as WHO, FAO, UNESCO, ILO, etc.). An exception is constituted by the UN Environment Programme, which, despite being a program, is under the Secretariat's administration.

# PACIFIC YOUTH PARTICIPATION UNDERPINNED BY PACIFIC VALUES: *ALOFA, TAUTUA, AND FA'AALOALO*

## Riki Welsh

Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation  
Trust, Aotearoa, New Zealand

## Josiah Tualamali'i

Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation  
Trust, Aotearoa, New Zealand

### Key takeaways:

- Young people of Indigenous cultures are best placed to incorporate their cultural values into different systems because they are often the ones who have spent their lives navigating multiple paradigms.
- Decision makers should encourage young people to bring their whole selves to any situation and empower young people to lean on the values of their upbringing when participating in decision-making and trying to navigate moral ambiguity.
- Making time and space for young people to learn and be reflexive is important. It is only with reflection that we can connect our actions to our value system, and this empowers and emboldens us in the idea that we have something worth contributing.

### The Pacific Youth Parliamentary Simulation

In 2010, the Pacific communities of Ōtautahi Christchurch, led by the [Ministry for Pacific Peoples](#), hosted a parliamentary simulation for Pacific young people, with 48 selected by application, of which the youngest was 14 and oldest 28 years old. This project was built on the regional simulations—beginning in Fiji in 1996—developed by Dr Robert Nicole (Nicole, 1996).

This simulation was a space where Pacific youth participants were presented with local, national and international issues by community members. The participants were to develop and then express their own thoughts on matters such as mining on conservation land, youth justice and regional development. The participants learned about parliamentary processes and how to express their opinions in formal government processes while retaining and demonstrating the values unique to their cultures, namely Pacific values.

The work to incorporate Pacific values in formal government processes has continued with the participants forming the Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation Trust (PYLAT), which supports and advances Pacific youth

participation underpinned by Pacific values within Western democratic processes.

### Youth Expression Underpinned by Pacific Values in Decision-Making

Pauline Luafutu-Simpson (2011) explored Samoan and Pacific values through her model *Fausiga o le fale tele*. The three values that she highlighted are *alofa*, *tautua* and *fa'aaloalo*. These values shape much of what we, as Pacific peoples, do—these values provide grounds for an approach to communication that allows Pacific youth to participate in democracy in a way that is culturally safe.

***Alofa / Aroha / Ofa*** is best expressed in the English language as 'love'. Luafutu-Simpson (2011) defined *alofa / aroha / ofa* as conducting oneself with the utmost care, kindness and honesty while being humble and vulnerable and speaking without spite or negativity. Expression done with *alofa / aroha / ofa* is truthful, kind, self-revealing (even if uncomfortable) and promotes sharing with the intent of seeking justice and mutual growth as opposed to creating further conflict or confusion. Speaking with *alofa / aroha / ofa* is a strength for Pacific youth to embrace because it enhances the

effectiveness of the communication by framing messages in a way that is more likely to be received with open ears.

***Tautua*** can be described as articulating love through action without seeking acknowledgement or reward. If youth participation in decision-making is delivered as part of their *tautua*, their inputs are more likely to be viewed as genuine contributions to discussion as opposed to being perceived as a young person simply overstepping their mark or “meddling” in things that they ought not to. *Tautua* can imbue youth participation with the sense that a young person is fulfilling a duty to their community.

Finally, in our understanding, to act with ***fa'aaloalo*** is to act with respect. *Fa'aaloalo* perhaps conflicts the most with the Western concepts of “youth participation”. *Fa'aaloalo* involves expressing *alofa* and *tautua* to elders, to people of authority and status and to many others for varying reasons. Showing *fa'aaloalo* can provide a person with a sense of pride and achievement. To be disrespectful is shameful, a cause of embarrassment that extends to a person's family and networks. In the instance of



“youth participation” and expressing opinions when it comes to decision-making, Pacific youth could be seen as being disrespectful and acting without *fa’aaloalo* if they participated in a way that belittled their elders (even if those elders were political opponents) or criticised the establishment even if it was worthy of criticism.

It could be argued that underpinning genuine youth participation with the value of *fa’aaloalo* is impossible because the concept of “respect” is so subjective. However, we argue that *fa’aaloalo* does not preclude youth participation but strengthens it. Our argument is that the more *fa’aaloalo* a young person has, the stronger their participation is. To gain *fa’aaloalo*, you must give *fa’aaloalo*.

### Pacific Values and Youth Participation in Democracy in Practice

Global norms promote youth participation as a universal human right, and our Pacific norms instil in us that youth participation must be underpinned by our cultural values. In our opinion, to participate in democracy with the values of *alofa*, *tautua* and *fa’aaloalo* is to contribute to our countries’ decision-making in a way that is kind, focused on serving others and actioned with respect to everyone, including those who have an opposing opinion. Therefore, to participate in decision-making with our values is not a disadvantage but a strength that can enhance the decisions made for the benefit of all. As is the reality for most young people of migrant or indigenous heritage, our ability to navigate between worlds is our strength, one that can be shared with everyone.

# MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN UNITED NATIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

## Peace Monica Pimer

Executive Director, Nile Girls Forum, Uganda

### Key takeaways:

- **Invest in capacity building:** Provide training and mentorship programmes to equip young people with the skills and confidence needed for effective participation.
- **Shift the paradigm:** Move beyond tokenistic participation by creating youth-driven structures for cocreation of policy solutions and political and civic processes.
- **Leverage technology:** Ensure affordable, high-quality, reliable internet connectivity and electricity to maximise digital engagement of youth.
- **Prioritise youth-led initiatives:** Support youth-driven projects and ensure diverse voices of youth are represented in decision-making processes.
- **Provide non-earmarked funding:** Enable youth-led initiatives to thrive with flexible financial support.
- **Evaluation and feedback:** Establish mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and continuously improve processes of youth engagement.

According to the [World Youth Report](#) (2020), 1.2 billion young people aged 15–24 years old account for 16% of the global population. However, these youth often face exclusion from the decision-making processes that are critical to their well-being and that directly impact their lives.

### Setting

Africa's youth population—which already comprised 19% of the global youth in 2015—is projected to increase by 42% by 2030 and more than double by 2055. Despite representing such a significant demographic, young people's voices are often marginalised or merely symbolically represented in policy formulation and programme design processes across the continent.

Recent structural changes mean that, in some contexts, young people's long-nurtured autonomy has been curtailed. For example, in April 2024, the integration and absorption of Uganda's [National Youth Council](#) into the secretariat under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development significantly curtailed its autonomy and marginalised its decision-making authority. Previously independent, the Council's merger into the ministry has restricted its ability to act

independently. Similar developments in different contexts are equally disappointing.

### Opportunity

Engaging youth presents an opportunity to be led by their creativity, energy and insights to effectively address global challenges. Authorities should invest in youth-led initiatives. For example, my organisation, the Nile Girls Forum, is an organisation led by young women to support youth living in slums and hard-to-reach communities who are affected by displacement and disabilities. Through our Peer Pals Movement, we equip these young people with leadership skills, and enable them to lead campaigns in Uganda like [#WeLeadOurSRHR](#) (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) and [#KeepGirlsInSchool](#). These initiatives provide platforms for otherwise marginalised young people to influence policies and programmes related to girls' education and young women's sexual reproductive health, for example. Through our work and advocacy efforts, two peers participated in consultations on the current National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2021–2027) organised by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, UNICEF and Girls Not Brides Uganda.

## Evidence

When they are able to organise, young people are incredibly powerful. In 2023, through the Nile Girls Forum, young women with disabilities in Zombo district, Uganda, led a campaign to enhance the accessibility of health services for persons with disabilities. They engaged with the District Health Office and the Office of the District Community Development Officer. As a result of their advocacy, at the 10th November 2023 District Budget meeting at the district headquarters, a commitment was made by the District Health Officer to include disability-friendly delivery beds in health facilities in the 2024/25 financial year.

Providing young people with opportunities to build their skills and competencies is also important. For example, thanks to free training provided by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for East and Horn of Africa and the African Union, youth from the East and Horn of Africa, including myself, were empowered to understand how to counter hate speech and understand the Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security. Through this initiative, I appeared on a panel during the Forum on NGOs' participation in the 77th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), where I shared insights on how to disseminate this framework among young people in the region. This initiative led to the establishment of a new youth-led programme, "PeersForPeace", which is focused on promoting

peacebuilding and conflict resolution under the auspices of the Nile Girls Forum.

In sum, when youth are inclusively engaged and well equipped through capacity building, they are better prepared to collaborate more effectively. Moreover, the skills and relationships developed through initiatives can create ripple effects, inspiring others to get involved in participatory processes and fostering a culture of civic engagement and social responsibility.

## Call to Action

Policymakers must prioritise meaningful youth engagement by developing and implementing youth engagement strategies, supporting youth-led initiatives, collaborating closely with youth organisations and investing in the mental health of youth as an integral part of their development. By creating authentic and inclusive opportunities for youth participation, we can collectively forge more equitable, innovative and sustainable futures for all.

# NEUTRALITY AS THE TOOL OF THE OPPRESSOR

## Anonymous

Government employee, high-income country

### Key takeaways:

- Pursue further research (through surveys, interviews and other targeted efforts) inside the civil service to understand how the pressure of presenting “neutrality” has impacted the careers and work of those from marginalised backgrounds.
- Review moral and ethical codes and policy guidance for civil servants to clearly delineate between neutrality and objectivity without encouraging sanitisation or reinforcing existing power structures that favour whiteness.

Against the backdrop of ongoing conflict, the world has seen the exacerbation of a concept that is positioned to do more harm than good: neutrality. Amongst civil servants, conflict is discussed with caution and detachment, as if acknowledging emotion produces weak policy. The reality is that policy is personal: the consequences of implementing policy could mean the difference between families being reunited or wiped from existence.

Desmond Tutu said, “if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”. Neutrality requires the privilege to divorce oneself from the implications and reality of oppression. Those who can be neutral benefit from the privilege that allows them to be ignorant, willingly or not. Why muster the emotional labour to care about famine when your children have the guarantee of food on the table? Why care about war when you do not go to sleep to the sounds of artillery shells? Why worry about homophobia when you are not anxious about holding hands with your partner in public?

As a government employee of a high-income, “Western” country, I have noted that the trend towards so-called “neutrality” in policy creation is becoming increasingly pronounced. With the diversification of the civil service because

of the intentional recruitment of marginalised communities, the impacts of “far-away” crises are now felt closer to the seats of power. With the rise of social media and citizen journalism, more individuals are exposed to emotional, first-hand experiences of crises. Consequently, it is understandable that governments introduce measures of objectivity to produce fact-based policy. Unfortunately, this has led to personal experiences being seen as a weakness to the ability of civil servants to carry out their duties. Further, this has resulted in those with lived experiences or personal ties being systematically excluded from certain portfolios—in the name of “neutrality”.

This is not to reject objectivity but rather to oppose the sanitising of reality in the name of neutrality. When so-called neutrality results in the systemic exclusion and further marginalisation of communities who are already experiencing the tragedy of crisis, the question remains: Who does end up creating policies? Those that are systemically privileged: disproportionately, in my context, privileged white people often with no link to or lived experience of the portfolios they are engaging in/with. Neutrality as detachment reinforces the notion that these same white people are the most capable of rational and objective policy implementation while simultaneously pushing out marginalised (though not always

visible members of these groups) colleagues and setting the ground for policy that does not always react to the urgency, reality and impacts of crises.

The overlap between whiteness and neutrality means that when crises impact white communities, the lived experiences of the members of those communities are respected as objective. Conversely, when crises impact non-white communities, non-white people are deemed biased. These dynamics entrench and reinforce systems where whiteness is perceived to be rational and neutral.

For example, in reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, civil servants of Ukrainian heritage were engaged and encouraged to be involved in policy creation because of the deemed value of their lived experience. These civil servants were sometimes given opportunities to work on files that they had personal connections with owing to their identity and were not suspected of being disloyal to their government because of their identity. Conversely, against the backdrop of Israel’s assault against Palestine civil servants of Palestinian heritage (and other Middle Eastern identities) continue to experience systemic exclusion because their identity is considered to call into question their loyalty to their government and their ability to provide

rational and effective policy advice—a question that was never levied at the white Ukrainians in the same position. This is not to say that Ukrainians should not be involved in policy that directly impacts them—rather, to encourage decision-makers to afford all backgrounds the same opportunity without the assumption that lived experience and emotional connection is a weakness in the ability of civil servants to fulfil their duties. There is value in having lived experience inform good policy decisions because it enriches the outcome, creating policy that is effective, efficient and culturally and contextually relevant.

To me, as a young person who holds many identities that are impacted by policies created in high-income countries, this reductionist approach to policy creation and the double standards that favour whiteness are concerning. As Western, high-income countries become more diverse, it is a missed opportunity for the civil service to not benefit from this expertise. It is doubly a shame for these civil servants of marginalised backgrounds to suppress their lived experience out of fear of professional reprisal or to take their skills elsewhere

because they feel that the civil service does not appreciate their lived experiences.

The positioning of “neutrality” as superior to the real and difficult lived experiences of those impacted is a failure of modern policy creation. A detachment from the impacts and consequences of policy undermines the “Western” moral positioning of human rights—if the West stands for human rights, equality and freedom for all, then how does so-called neutrality towards the impacts of policy on communities meaningfully engage with the emotion and experience of those living with the impacts of that policy? To marginalised communities, effective and representative policy is not a nice-to-have: it is a need-to-have.

# MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG INDIGENOUS LEADERS FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND GENDER EQUALITY

## Nohora Alejandra Quiguntar

Coalición de Acción Feminista por la Justicia Climática, UN Women, Colombia

### Key takeaways:

- Institutionalise the meaningful participation, representation and leadership of Indigenous youth for sustainability.
- Strengthen the integration of gender and Indigenous considerations into policy and legal frameworks.
- Shift the narratives and remove structural barriers regarding voice, markets and land rights, including unpaid care, and racial and gender injustices.

Young people today, particularly girls, young women and Indigenous youth, continue to face multiple barriers to meaningful participation in social and political life, as well as their overall well-being, including violence and limited and unequal access to resources, knowledge, information, networks and markets. They also face multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion due to persistent inequalities, discriminatory laws, harmful stereotypical cultural norms and unequal social gender roles imposed on them within their communities and families.

### The Importance of Gender Equality

Despite all these obstacles, many young people are mobilising to challenge entrenched power structures by fighting for gender equality and justice. They stand in opposition to conservative movements that seek to reverse the gains made in gender equality across the world. They are also pushing policymakers to recognise the multiplicity of young people's roles, identities and diversity and are calling for their needs, interests and priorities to be incorporated into policies that can transform social and economic structures.

### Young Indigenous Women Leading Climate Action Efforts

Furthermore, young people have demonstrated that they have the skills, knowledge and networks to effectively lead efforts in response to the climate crisis. Addressing the climate crisis effectively is closely tied to advancing and protecting gender equality efforts. Decision-makers need to respond to this crisis while recognising the role of Indigenous women and girls in biodiversity conservation in order to achieve transformational and systemic changes for a sustainable and equitable future.

The knowledge safeguarded by Indigenous women as the primary managers and users of natural resources in many fragile and conflict-affected contexts is invaluable. This highlights their crucial role in the prevention, management and resolution of tensions related to natural resources and peace processes.

### Institutionalising Indigenous Youth Leadership

Decision-makers should institutionalise the meaningful participation, representation and

leadership of Indigenous youth in all decision-making processes at local, national and international levels. There are various ways in which this can be achieved:

- Create spaces that allow for meaningful dialogue, trust-building and partnerships between Indigenous youth and policymakers, thereby fostering collaboration and understanding between policy makers and different stakeholders, including governments, NGOs and the private sector.
- Bring together youth and Indigenous youth groups with decision-makers to create networks and partnerships between youth organisations, provide opportunities for collaboration, and share best practices for addressing common challenges with a peace-focused approach.
- Support and promote the involvement of Indigenous youth in national, regional and international advocacy processes to promote the defence of human rights and territory.
- Strengthen frontline movements of youth organisations, especially those working on

peace processes in countries experiencing internal conflict.

- Foster safe dialogue to frankly discuss the challenges and opportunities for young people to meaningfully influence decision-making at the highest level, moving from participation to influencing real transformative change.
- Provide Indigenous youth and adolescents access to international mechanisms, such as the United Nations, giving them a platform to emphasise the importance of strong accountability mechanisms and the meaningful and active inclusion of young people in the implementation, monitoring and review of government outcomes at community, national, regional and global levels.
- Strengthen frameworks that integrate gender and Indigenous considerations into laws and policies related to natural resources and productive assets, such as land, water and energy, which continue to largely ignore the specific needs and rights of Indigenous women and girls.

Finally, a fundamental narrative shift is required that recognises the essential role of unpaid care, the need for women's land and decision-making rights to address the climate emergency, and the mainstreaming of racial and gender justice to ensure the building of an inclusive green economy.

# SYSTEMIC IMBALANCES IN THE WORLD ORDER AND HOW THEY RELATE TO EDUCATION

## Fhatuwani Muswobi

Master of Laws Student, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

### Key takeaways:

- Policymakers need to draft integrated policies that do not only deal with one issue at a time or in isolation, but aim to holistically assess problems and fill as many gaps as possible all at once.
- Policymakers should focus on creating a better, decolonized education system, especially in Africa, with elements that are true to Africa.
- Policymakers should understand that solutions to world issues need not be universal. Instead, policy can be localized, and there can be more than one way to solve the same problem.

In the 21st century one would wonder whether this is the future that those who came before us would have imagined, one of unnecessary wars, femicides, famine and continuing inequalities. The purpose of this insight is to provide an opinion on potential policies around the digitalization of education, specifically in Africa. This insight is not intended to be taken as an all-encompassing or know it all but merely as an opinion.

Education means different things to different groups of people and advancing education also means different things to different people. For some it means moving to technology, for others advancing their curriculum to meet the times and for others advancing means finally having an actual classroom or conducive environment to actually learn in. As such, with these differing conceptions of what it means to advance education, the potential for the digitalization of education might be a success for some but a major setback for others. The reason it might be a major setback is due to the Euro-centric norms still expected of Africans. Indeed, I would like to highlight that, in many spheres, the digitalization of education equates to ascribing to a notion of modernity that is euro-centric. Whilst the digitalisation of education may work for many

in the northern hemisphere, I feel it is likely to further the inequalities in the global south where access to technology is not even the biggest faced issue in comparison to famine, femicides or even lack of access to quality education.

The reason for the inequities described above is in large part related to coloniality. Coloniality refers to an entire system of ideas, and is an attitude, orientation, and a power structure that creates and perpetuates a hegemonic and Eurocentric matrix of knowledge (Bhatia, 2021). It is critical to address coloniality when assessing such problems: the problems faced by marginalized societies. Thus education cannot be treated in isolation without taking coloniality into consideration.

The aim of this perspective is not to discredit the work of others but merely to bring a different insight and a potential shift in the way forward, hopefully re-imagining and rethinking the solutions to the problems faced and fundamentally addressing them thus disrupting coloniality.

Whilst education is but one issue faced by the 'post-colonial' world, it is one of many facets that further perpetuates coloniality. An example

is how colonialism is thought to children in schools, as though it was not a cruel act that dispossessed many Africans.

As a South African, I feel that our education system furthers the dis-memberment of our being, such that an African child learns to hate their heritage in their days at school. This is because of how negative the image of African history presented is (Baloy, 2020). My experiences are summed up in Steve Biko's question: 'How can an African child avoid losing respect for his tradition when in school his whole cultural background is summed up in one word: barbarism?' (Biko, 1987).

Coloniality extends from the schoolroom to society. Some African people live in an asymmetrical world recognized as the 'modern world which is sustained by pedagogies and epistemologies that produce alienated Africans who are socialized to dislike the African continent that gave birth to them and to prefer Europe and America, which reject them (Ndlovu Gatsheni, 2015). As such my argument is that, in this current reality, if the aim is merely to digitalize current curricula as is, then not much is being done besides further perpetuating coloniality.



Today, digitalizing education in many cases means keeping the current pedagogies and curriculums and simply changing the methods used to convey them. Thus, as it stands the education in Africa is and will continue to remain assimilation into global north ways of knowing and being. An example I will make is my own, I went to school for 12 years and not once did I actually learn of myself or my people's way of knowing instead I learned little by little to not care about African history. As such this education will still produce young African people who still yearn for belonging in this 'modern world', and simply further the status quo, rather than cultivating their own pedagogies and expanding their own epistemologies and rehumanizing their colonized bodies.

I understand the potential for digitalization, but as an African I believe that the most important call is the one for decolonization, which is the rehumanizing of the dehumanized colonized body. Rehumanizing the colonized body would mean disrupting colonial systems that were never truly made for Africans and reigniting human agency in Africans especially the youth and not have them simply ascribe to the current norms. Decolonization may begin in education because education is what shapes the minds of future. Before advocating for education's "advancement" through digitalisation we should first advocate for its reconstruction.

I believe that to reconstruct and decolonise education, when drafting education policies, policymakers should first consider how those policies will fare with every other aspect of the people's lives. What I mean is, it's one thing to digitalize education and have learners using high end gadgets but if they live in dangerous townships they would be in danger simply for being in possession of those gadgets. Equally, they may not be able to afford to buy data, or they may attend classes hungry, or may not even have network coverage, among many more scenarios which are the lived realities of many.

The world order that currently exists has always been oppressive and thrives on the oppression of at least one category of humans. As such, even if we advance the digitalization of the mechanisms of education without thinking about and working to counter coloniality we will not be solving the issues faced by the marginalized. Instead we will be conforming to the status quo and further perpetuating its inequalities. Let us not fear the unknown and, rather, re-imagine our education systems and the world order, too. Not doing so is what holds us back from true freedom and equality.

# YOUTH MOVING BEYOND GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP)

## Anu Peltola

Director of Statistics, UN Trade and Development,  
Switzerland

## Laurence Jones-Williams

Executive Director, Rethinking  
Economics International, United Kingdom

## Trine Schmidt

IISD Former Strategic Advisor to the Beyond Lab,  
UN Office at Geneva, Switzerland

### Key takeaways:

- Ensure broad consultations with stakeholders—including Member States and civil society—and meaningful youth representation in the anticipated high-level expert group on moving beyond GDP.
- Support spaces for intergenerational dialogue on moving beyond GDP at the Summit of the Future, and aimed towards the General Assembly 2025, through regional and international engagement opportunities and dialogues to discuss the early recommendations of the high-level expert group.

The need to move beyond the narrow focus on gross domestic product (GDP) as the dominating indicator to measure the success of countries is nothing new. However, there is renewed momentum to challenge this narrow approach and complement GDP with metrics that put the focus on people and the planet. In the United Nations (UN), this agenda is included as an element of [Our Common Agenda](#) to future-proof the multilateral system. The Summit of the Future, taking place in New York in September 2024, is a key milestone for arriving at a new international consensus to deliver on the promises made in international agreements, such as the sustainable development goals.

### Creating a Space for Youth Input and Intergenerational Dialogue

To infuse the discussions ahead of the [Summit of the Future](#) with diverse youth perspectives, the [Beyond Lab](#) launched a global essay contest on the topic of Moving Beyond GDP in collaboration with UN Trade and Development (formerly UNCTAD) and the international student network, Rethinking Economics. More than 630 young people from over 50 countries responded to this challenge and submitted their views, ideas and hopes for a more comprehensive measure of progress. Of the submissions, 10

outstanding and diverse essays were selected and published.

Putting the young essay winners at the centre of the conversation, the Beyond Lab and partners convened an intergenerational dialogue for the winners to discuss their recommendations with UN senior officials and experts, Member State representatives, and civil society and business leaders. At the UN Palais des Nations in Geneva, the young essay winners were supported to organise and facilitate break-out groups centred on topics they defined as important and to share their perspectives on what counts—and therefore should be counted—in the future.

In these discussions, developing a framework to move beyond GDP was recognised as a complex task to which no single organisation or person holds the key. As such, continuous dialogue and deliberation are warranted to arrive at a comprehensive framework, one which is reoriented around what we truly value and is geared towards promoting a just and sustainable future for all. Forging this future requires reforming how we teach economics, engaging young professionals and students in this process and forging more spaces for inclusive discussions to exchange ideas.

### So What Did We Learn?

Although young people are as likely to have as diverse perspectives on this topic as older generations, they have a higher stake in the future of our economic systems and in how we measure them for decades to come. The strong interest in the competition and the passion expressed in the many essays make it clear that young people from all over the world care deeply about reshaping the economy. They want to see real action on developing a new framework that moves beyond GDP, and urgently.

Broadly speaking, according to the young people who shared their perspectives as part of the global essay contest, a framework to value what counts should

- Value nature for its biodiversity and recognise nature's crucial role for human well-being as well as its cultural importance to all, including indigenous peoples.
- Nuance our understanding of well-being by recognising the importance of relationships—with each other and with our environment—for our individual and collective well-being.
- Assess the environmental sustainability of an economy and promote responsible

production in line with planetary boundaries while creating genuine value for workers and society rather than benefits to a few.

- Embrace a human rights approach to economics, one which respects the economic, social and cultural rights of every human being and promotes equity and fairness, including vis-à-vis future generations.
- Promote responsible stewardship of natural resources within and between countries, addressing persistent inequalities in the opportunities for development so as to benefit current and future generations.

### What's Next?

At the Summit of the Future, Member States are expected to adopt an action-oriented Pact for the Future. The revision 4 (September 2024) includes the need to move beyond GDP under Action 55: *'We will develop a framework on measures of progress on sustainable development to complement and go beyond gross domestic product.'* To arrive at such a framework, the draft pact requests that the UN secretary-general establish an independent high-level expert group to develop recommendations with respect to potential indicators that go beyond GDP. The draft pact further calls for these recommendations to be considered by the Member States at the General Assembly in September 2025.

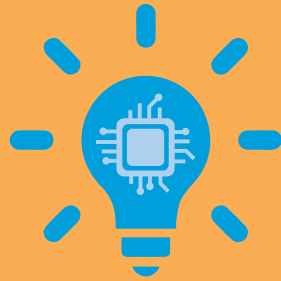
This process represents an excellent opportunity to expand on the initiative by the Beyond Lab, UN Trade and Development and Rethinking Economics by ensuring meaningful youth engagement throughout this formal process going forward. We encourage the secretary-general to nominate at least one youth representative to be part of the high-level expert group. Furthermore, the objective and timeline of the high-level expert group should envisage discussion of their recommendations with a wider group of stakeholders before presenting these to the General Assembly, including with youth organisations as one of the key stakeholder groups to be consulted.

Figure 5

Key Values Foregrounded in the 630 Essays Received From All Over the World



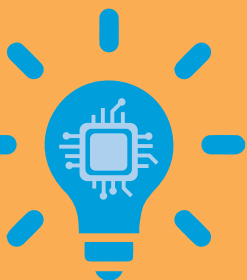
Source: Authors



# 4

## MOVEMENT-BUILDING

**Movement-building** focuses on supporting young people as they organise themselves. It highlights young people's powerful activism as they change the world, drawing on examples of young people's participation in civic spaces, analysing the challenges of horizontalism in Iran, drawing lessons from the African and Latin American movements of working children and youth, and examining the inclusion of youth in Morocco's democratic structures and processes.



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN EVOLVING CIVIC SPACES

## Rinu Oduala

2023 Hurford Youth Fellow, World Movement for Democracy and Project Director, Connect Hub NG, Nigeria

### Key takeaways:

- Acknowledge that those closest to the problem often have the best solutions.
- Support grassroots initiatives led by young people, both online and offline, providing funding and resources to youth-led initiatives.
- Create dedicated spaces for interaction and trust-building that specifically cater to both policymakers and citizens.
- Encourage partnerships through joint efforts between digital advocacy groups, youth organizations, civil society, and thought leaders.
- Ensure that recommendations are followed through with concrete actions, including regular progress updates, transparent decision-making, and accountability for those in power.
- Support technologies that facilitate democratic participation and collaboration, such as open-source platforms and digital spaces that guarantee data privacy and safety.
- Encourage the participation of young people in decision-making processes by using inclusive language, exploring diverse formats, and removing age restrictions for public consultation and deliberation.

In 2020 alone, Nigeria, along with Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo, recorded 577 incidents of protests and demonstrations, many led by youth. These protests often centered around poor governance and demands for better socio-economic conditions, reflecting a broader trend across West Africa. For instance, the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria, triggered by police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), highlighted [deeper issues](#) such as poverty, unemployment, and limited youth involvement in policy making. These issues were compounded by inadequate education, poor healthcare, and systemic corruption.

Despite youth being the numerical majority in these countries, their political engagement is largely limited to voting. They face significant barriers to running for office and are often used as pawns in political struggles by elites. This exploitation exacerbates intergenerational conflicts and fuels violent protests against the established order. Owing to their history of marginalization, young people have turned to mass protests to voice their frustrations and demand meaningful societal change.

Young people have come to believe, due to the failures of their governments, that their power lies not in [traditional political channels](#), or the ballot box, but in alternative channels such as

digital platforms, where their voices cannot be ignored. Social media and digital platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and WhatsApp have become crucial for organizing protests, amplifying voices globally and challenging the status quo. This digital activism helps sustain street protests and establish both online and physical spaces for civic engagement.

Nevertheless, when young people call for change on digital platforms, they often face mockery, trolling, and dismissal—to the point where their demands spill onto the streets. This shift, where online activism merges with offline action, aligns with [Castells'](#) observations that combining these approaches maximizes visibility, mobilization, and impact. Digital activism, once considered “performative,” has proven effective in transcending borders and mobilizing global audiences. As these movements gain momentum online, they spill onto streets and public squares, compelling governments to respond.

Young people are now central in driving social and political change through digital engagement, passionately debating on social media platforms, and mobilizing in online and offline spaces, thus highlighting the [changing nature of civic engagement](#). They influence national debates, organize voter drives, hold governments accountable, and push for

discussions on critical issues such as police brutality, climate change, LGBTQ rights, and racial justice. They leverage hashtags, tweets, and the streets to shape [public discourse](#) and challenge established norms.

Policymakers often lag in their engagement with digital spaces, although these digital spaces present an opportunity to bridge a critical engagement gap between citizens. Many policymakers are unfamiliar with the dynamics of these platforms owing to [an intergenerational gap](#), or perceive them as unimportant in decision-making. Some resist engaging due to the intensity of online criticism. Studies show that politicians often use a [one-way “broadcast style”](#) on social networks, replicating traditional campaign methods and limiting public interaction (Graham et al., 2013; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Stier et al., 2018). For example, during the #EndSARS protests or #BlackLivesMatter movements, policymakers were pressured online but were reluctant to engage. Research further highlights this disconnect between policymakers’ digital practices and the expectations of digitally active citizens, which hinders transparency, accountability, and inclusivity of youth perspectives in policy-making.

To improve engagement between youth and policymakers, note that top-down approaches often miss the mark when it comes to youth engagement. Navigating the challenges facing policymakers and democracy in the digital age requires raising awareness and increasing access to credible information and tools for young

people and policymakers alike. Balancing the benefits of digital spaces with safeguards against misinformation, online harassment, and data privacy concerns is essential. This balance will help promote intergenerational dialogue and facilitate cooperation between young civic actors and decision-makers, which can bridge the gap between traditional and digital civic engagement offline and online. With these new digital spaces inspiring global movements, we have seen and will continue to see young people shaping the path of democracy and igniting change from screens to the streets, from online forums to town halls, and from tweets to protests. Finally, their protests will transform policy.

# THE TRAGEDY OF HORIZONTALISM IN IRAN: THE NEED FOR POLITICAL AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

## Arash Azizi

Board member, Nonviolent Initiative  
for Democracy, Iran

### Key takeaways:

- Invest in the patient and years-long effort needed to build institutions and collective organizations.
- Place the emphasis on bringing people together as a prerequisite for engaging in common projects in pursuit of common goals.
- Attempt the formation of political parties, even if based abroad, and trade unions, women's groups, or other civic associations.
- Civic associations in democratic countries around the world must lend support to such efforts elsewhere.

To bring about change and improve their lives, the Iranian people, especially youth and women, have tried a wide variety of strategies in the past few decades. Their diverse goals for betterment have included calling for the democratization of the country's political structures, improvement in women's rights (such as lifting of the mandatory veiling rule), changes to widespread restrictions on freedom of speech and expression, better economic conditions, and freedom from corruption and incompetence.

In attempting to achieve these ends, their strategies have often included taking part in the elections held by the Islamic Republic (even though these are far from free and fair, and limited to inside candidates) and, when that has not led to the desired results, mass protests in 2009, 2017, 2019, and 2022–23. Young segments of the population have played a key role in all these movements. Those born in the 1980s played a key role in the 2009 movements, while Gen Z—particularly young women—played an important role in the 2022–23 “Women, Life, Freedom” movement. The latter have put themselves on the political map as a group that, compared with previous generations, is more uncompromising in the pursuit of their goals.

However, despite these mass protests, what has mostly eluded the people of Iran is the formation of durable political and civic organizations. The repressive policies of the Islamic Republic largely account for this state of disorganization. The regime has heavily cracked down on most collective efforts to build durable organizations. During the 2022–2023 protests, for instance, the regime jailed more than 8,000 activists, most of whom were movers and shakers of various organizing efforts.

However, repression does not completely explain the lack of durable Iranian organizations. For instance, millions of Iranians live abroad in democratic countries and enjoy freedom of assembly. However, they have also failed to organize strong civic or political organizations. For instance, despite the fact that there are more than 50,000 Iranian students studying [abroad](#), and that they have organized hundreds of rallies in support of the 2009 and 2022–23 protests in Iran, they have not built an organization.

One important reason for this failure is ideological. In other words, youth do not build organizations because many of them have become convinced that organizations

are not necessary. In 2022, for instance, an Iranian activist wrote an [op-ed](#) in a major left-leaning media outlet to argue against “classic organizations” and “hierarchical structures.” Instead, he advocated for a “headless movement,” a phrase that has long been very popular among Iranian protesters. For a period, belief in the so-called “headless” movement was amplified in conjunction with illusions of the power of social media, that is, a belief that newly founded outlets such as Facebook and Twitter could resolve the many predicaments organizing had faced because they made for easy connections between citizens. Of course, social media and new technologies have played an indispensable role both as organizing tools and as outlets for global media solidarity. However, too much reliance on social media has also resulted in wishful thinking: Why engage in the hard work of building organizations if you can change the world via a catchy hashtag?

This trouble in organizing movements is in no way limited to Iran. As journalist Vincent Bevins (2023) has shown, ideas of horizontalism were popular among movements around the world in the 2010s on both the left and right. Yet as Bevins

argues, ideas of horizontalism have hindered protest movements from realizing their goals.

Indeed, the Iranian case shows the tragic outcome of not building civic and political organizations.

One of the reasons for this failure was lack of an organizational, representative, and political culture. Although supporters of the 2022–23 movement in Iran wanted the same outcome (democratization of Iran), there were serious differences between them, and they had no experience of adjudicating these differences—something that could have been gained if Iranians had more recent experience with organization building.

Another result of this state of *disorganization* is that the lessons of previous generations of struggle are not easily passed down. Iranians who fought for democracy in 2009, for instance,

could not share their experiences in a systematic manner with those fighting the same fight in 2022–23.

In 2024, Iran was in a worse shape than, say 2009, in almost every single way. This is despite the fact that millions have fought in mass movements to make the country better and that hundreds have lost their lives for this cause. [Many are realizing](#) that a blind faith in horizontalism, resulting in a lack of formal organizations, has played a key role in bringing about this failure.



# LESSONS FROM THE AFRICAN AND LATIN AMERICAN MOVEMENTS OF WORKING CHILDREN

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### Key takeaways:

- Participation is multifaceted: speaking at international forums and also organising demonstrations, participating in coordination committees and advising governments on the implementation and translation of development programmes.
- Sustainable youth participation needs local anchorage and community-based development to ensure contextual relevance through myriad grassroots groups that are anchored in their local communities.
- Intergenerational and adaptive learning is key to sustainable child and youth participation, with former members taking on a supervisory role as adults.

### Introduction

*“We, the working children and adolescents of Latin America, Africa and Asia, have come together to assert our rights, express our demands and champion our aspirations.”*

MOLACNNATs, Latin America; MAEJT, Africa; Children: Ambassadors of Change (CAOC), Asia (2022).

*Joint declaration of the movements of children and adolescent workers in the light of ILO’s 5th Global conference on Child Labour*

The working children’s movements undertaken in South America, Africa and India are considered trendsetters when it comes to child and youth participation. Since the 1990s, the manifestos and reports of these movements have emphasised that children and youth must participate in such initiatives to claim their rights. As former members and current coordinators, as well as external researchers, of the Latin American and African movements, in this article, we illustrate the lessons that the movements’ decades of experience can

teach us with regard to child-led advocacy and protection practices in the Global South.

### The Movements

The origins of the Latin American movement *Movimiento Latinoamericano de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores* (MOLACNNATs) can be traced to the Peruvian movement of working children, which was founded in 1976 and spread to other Latin American countries during the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast, the *Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs* (MAEJT) was started by a group of young domestic workers in Senegal with support from the NGO Enda Tiers Monde. In 1991, these Senegalese domestic workers met with representatives of the Peruvian movement of working children and, thereafter, started to organise as self-representative workers. They were joined in their efforts to organise a common march for children’s rights by other groups of working children in Western Africa, which led to the creation of the African movement of working children and youth (MAEJT) in 1994.

### Learning from the Movements

**Participation is multifaceted.** The movements’ histories indicate that participation involves more

than simply speaking at international forums. The movements express their political positions by organising demonstrations, participating in coordination committees and advising governments. They are also involved in the implementation and translation of development programmes. While participation may uncover points of contention, these must not be concealed but addressed to ensure meaningful participation.

**Sustainable youth participation needs local anchorage and community-based development.** Although participation is multifaceted, its foundation lies in contextual relevance. The movements of working children rely on myriad grassroots groups that are anchored in their local communities. These groups function as independent support structures for working children. Although they draw from projects facilitated by child protection NGOs, they also exist independently from development programmes and sustainably engage with families, communities and society at large. This enables the inclusion of children with different backgrounds and levels of integration as well as peer-to-peer support for children in vulnerable situations. Thus, the movements, as representatives of children in different situations, speak to the possibility of

international youth representation beyond elite youth alone.

### Intergenerational and adaptive learning is key to sustainable child and youth participation.

Participation in movements and political processes is facilitated through the movements themselves. As adults, former members take on a supervisory role to enable children and young people to organise movements and represent the demands of their members. Children and youth members are constantly undergoing the processes of PAR and learning.

### Participation in the Movements

Participation in these movements starts at the grassroots level. Both the Latin American and the African movement consist of national associations that are made up of myriad “grassroots groups”. These groups often comprise neighbourhood-based children and youth clubs from various urban and rural regions.

In **MOLACNNATS**, the groups meet on a weekly basis in their respective neighbourhoods. Some of these groups are part of a broader NGO project that provides them with shelter and facilitates daily activities. During meetings, they discuss daily problems, learn about the movement or participate in marches for working children’s rights. Certain groups, with the help of NGO support, also offer children and youths job training or engagement in microfinance projects.

The local groups consist of minors (younger than 18 years) and adult allies called *colaboradores*.

The *colaboradores* not only organise the meetings and manage collaborations with donor NGOs but also teach the children about *protagonismo*, which is the distinct understanding of child participation according to MOLACNNATS. *Protagonismo* emphasises the children’s embedded and collective agency in political and social life. Members who have learnt about MOLACNNATS’ functioning and *protagonismo* can be elected as delegates of grassroots groups, national associations or regional movements. However, according to protocol, all decisions of the group, such as whether to participate in local demonstrations, are made based on a vote by the members.

In a similar fashion, **MAEJT’s** grassroots groups serve as platforms for voicing and determining solutions for the day-to-day issues faced by their members. They are spaces in which children and young people can implement programmes to protect their peers and encourage communities to develop safe spaces for young people. They are usually guided by experienced youth members

who are 18 to 30 years old. Within the movement, the participation of children is seen as necessary for their dignified inclusion in society. This vision has been centrally incorporated into the movement’s own version of child rights, the “[12 rights of the child](#)” to: read and write; express oneself; taught a trade; play and leisure; health care; be listened to; rest when sick; work in safety; be respected and afforded dignity; stay in the village; light and limited work; and to equitable justice.

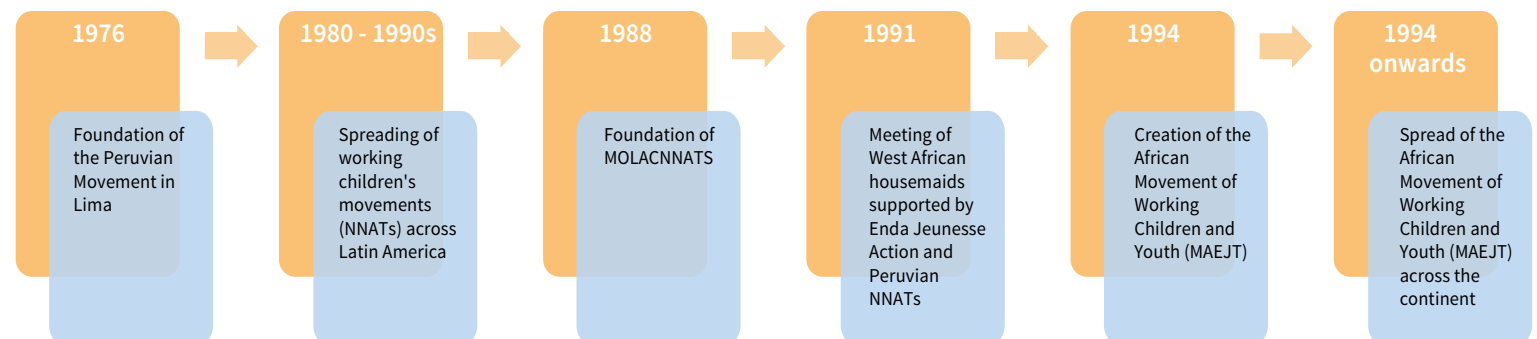
The grassroots groups identify problems and solutions in relation to these rights in their local contexts through participatory action research (PAR). More experienced members facilitate such PAR sessions, during which different techniques are used, such as participatory discussions, theatre plays or journalistic workshops. Through PAR, the members identify issues and develop solutions for these issues, which they then present in their community or go on to advocate by way of political advocacy processes. In some cases, participatory activities strengthen solidarity among

children by helping them identify real-life solutions such as communal self-help activities including income-generating projects or *tontine* (communal pooled money) systems. All of these efforts are supported by the regional coordination of MAEJT as well as by international and local NGOs. However, decisions related to the movement are taken according to group consensus. Finally, every MAEJT grassroots group also elects a child delegate, some of whom are representatives for the respective national association. These national delegates then become part of the movement’s Africa-wide organising committees, which organise transnational meetings, exchange experiences and make decisions at the regional level.

### Participation in Child Protection and Politics

Grassroots groups also serve as platforms for members to advocate their own policy positions in order to bring about change in a specific context. Nationally, all working children movements mobilise children and young people to take part in Labour Day demonstrations to raise awareness

**Figure 6**  
Building the Child Labour Movement: Historical Overview



about working children's needs and lobby local and national authorities, particularly for the regulation of child labour and child protection.

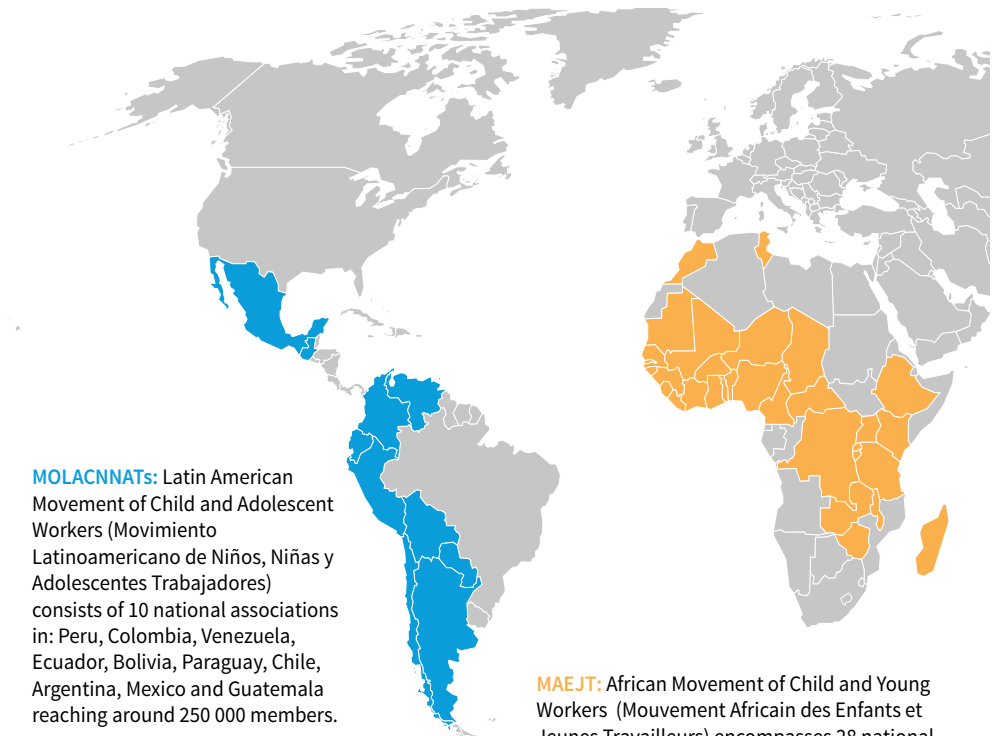
For example, in Burkina Faso, MAEJT representatives were involved in drafting the National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Child Labour. In Senegal, they are part of the local child protection coordination committees, the "Comités (Départementales) de Protection des Enfants." They also contributed to the "Stratégie Nationale de Protection des Enfants" adopted in 2012. The result of the participation of working children in national politics that made the most headlines was the change in the law regarding the minimum age at which children were allowed to work in Bolivia. The national association of MOLACNNATs—the Unión de Niños y Niñas Trabajadores de Bolivia (UNATsBO)—had drafted a law proposal and organised various demonstrations advocating alternative regulations for children's work. In 2014, they succeeded in legally lowering the working age for children, which was accompanied by the implementation of child protection measures (Liebel, 2015). However, the law was criticised by the International Labour Organization and its members states, as it did not align with the International Labour Standards for child labour, and it was ultimately withdrawn in 2018. The potential conflicts that can arise due to the working children's participation in discussions about children's work demonstrates the difficulty associated with ensuring children's participation in discussions of child labour at the international level (Liebel & Invernizzi, 2019; Van Daalen & Mabillard, 2019).

Further, beyond the issue of child labour regulation, MOLACNNATs and MAEJT proactively contribute to debates on international laws and norms. MAEJT representatives have participated in sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, contributing to the "A world fit for children" resolution proposed by UNICEF, the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, diverse UN Youth Assemblies as well as civil society forums, such as the World Social Forum. MAEJT has been granted observer status in the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), and youth representatives regularly attend African Union Summits. Consequently, MAEJT contributes to the monitoring of the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Being part of diverse child protection projects all over Africa, MAEJT is also an active part of protecting vulnerable children such as children on the move on the ground.

Furthermore, MOLACNNATs members contributed to the development of the General Comment on Children's Rights and the Environment with a Special Focus on Climate Change (General Comment No. 26) for the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 2023, which aims at clarifying and emphasising how children's rights are affected by environmental harm and climate change. In May 2024, MOLACNNATs members participated in a hearing before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) on the impacts of climate change on the rights of children and adolescents.

**Figure 7**

**Member Countries and Observers in Latin American and African Working Children and Youth Movements**



Source: MOLACNNATs and MAEJT

# INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON MIGRATION ROUTES

## The Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MAEJT)

The Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MAEJT)—loosely translated to “the African Movement of Working Children and Youth”—has prioritised improving the living conditions of children and youth. To this end, the MAEJT has focused its actions on protecting children and youth and promoting their rights and voices. These actions aim to promote the adoption of improved policies for children and youth, as well as their involvement in the decision-making processes that affect them.

Involving children and youth is the guiding principle of the MAEJT, and it runs through all the activities in which the movement is involved. MAEJT’s *Enfants et Jeunes sur les Routes Migratoires en Afrique du Nord et de l’Ouest* (EJM) project, which loosely translates to Children and Young People on Migration Routes in North and West Africa, is no exception.

### The EJM Project

The [EJM project’s](#) objective is for West and North African countries to have and apply a regulatory framework and national organisational capacities to ensure that children and youth on the move are protected and can access education to improve their opportunities for a dignified life.

The project’s title, “Children and Young People on the Move,” is a neutral, objective concept that enables children and youth to appropriate this name as an identity that values them without discrimination. Thus, when they speak in public, one will hear them say, “we EJM’s” or “we children and young people” instead of “we migrants,” which they find contemptuous.

### Project Implementation

The gateway to involving indigenous and migrant children and youth in the EJM project was the friendly meetings organised to create friendships between “mobile children and young people, and local children and young people.” This enthusiasm was illustrated by the efforts made by migrant children and youth, including establishing a place where they could welcome local visitors, fetching drinking water, making tea, finding mats and benches to sit on, and introducing these new friends to their parents and community leaders. Indigenous children see these meetings as opportunities to make new friends. They see these friendly encounters as a sign of respect for themselves and as an opportunity to feel valued. Such encounters between children more widely creates curiosity in local communities where these encounters took place, and one can see—for the first time—

previously ignored migrant children and youth meeting locals in full view of everyone.

During the project, the remainder of the discussions with the children and youth on the move focused on listening intently to their situation, their viewpoints, their vision of the solution to be provided, as well as the limitations to these solutions. The MAEJT felt it necessary to encourage mobile children and youth from different countries to take an interest in their peers. Doing so was a way of encouraging them to express themselves, become involved, and identify their limitations and fears. In line with the collectively established guidelines, they expressed their needs, which included the following: how to identify services, how to contact and interact with authorities, how to speak in public, and how to organise group discussions with their peers.

The MAEJT held capacity-building workshops for children and young migrants to engage further. These workshops focused on, for example, data collection leading to [participatory action research](#) for the EJM project, advocacy techniques, and children’s rights supplemented by other exercises in which children and youth learned, for instance, how to manage their own problems. These additional exercises included listening activities and negotiation visits with authorities. Where

### Key takeaways:

- Base the project on the needs of children and youth on the move, and extend its learnings into local communities, so they may act collectively with children and youth.
- In all projects, promote a participatory approach with children, youth, and communities.
- Centre the positive change on and for the children and youth concerned.



there was a need for working tools, we developed them with the children and young migrants.

Despite their status as migrants (i.e., people in the communities we are working in who are often ignored, considered to be outside the law, or in conflict with the communities), the children and young migrants could overcome their fears and engage in widespread community dialogues. These dialogues included authorities such as embassies in Guinea, trade unions and workers' sectors in Mali, and sultanates and town halls in Niger, organisations of nationals and youth leaders in Morocco, and other key actors in Tunisia. Due to their initiative, participation, and engagement with such authorities, these children and young migrants are proud to say, "We did it ourselves, we have friends to talk to, we are respected and invited by the communities, our financial situation has not changed, but we have acquired skills."

### Lessons for Meaningful Youth Engagement

The EJM project's approach is based on the needs of children and youth—not on criteria accepting some and eliminating others. It provides a model that could inspire other interventions. In our case, by using the EJM project as a starting point, we have already moved forward on other issues that impact local communities, such as social cohesion, accessing water, hygiene, economic opportunities, the promotion of integration, and the attainment of respect for the rights of children and youth.

Instead of focusing on a restrictive logical framework, the movement's flexible approach promotes a participatory search for solutions for children and youth. A flexible approach also facilitated the contribution of the host authorities and communities, who, rather than expecting to benefit from the project's resources, mostly made contributions in kind.

The involvement and participation of children and youth should not be dictated but should be co-constructed. The objective of participation should not be to focus on the project's results but on positive changes in the children or youth concerned, the solutions they raise, and how these solutions will contribute to the project's results. Projects should not sell dreams but should motivate the people involved to contribute their resources to making their dreams come true. Projects can also lead to innovations or allow the people involved to have the opportunity to discover new experiences without forcing them to adopt a particular solution or path.

# PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN MOROCCO: INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION OF YOUTH?

## Hassan Achraouaou

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### Key takeaways:

- The state must recognize and engage with young people's informal ways of participating.
- Despite changes in laws, state, governmental, and international institutions must change the prevailing social norms among traditional actors that exclude youth and assist young people in strengthening their knowledge of the laws and opportunities available to them in the public sphere.
- Laws related to participatory democracy must be reviewed so that these more explicitly include youth and account for digital engagement.

### Participatory Democracy and State Recognition of the Right to Participate

The 2011 Constitution of Morocco established a set of principles of good governance, including the principle of citizen and participatory democracy. It also devoted a group of chapters to laying the building blocks for the idea of participation and activating the roles of territorial actors (presidents of local councils, civil society actors, economic actors, etc.) to advance participation in their contexts. For example, the principle of free management and independence in laws relating to regions, prefectures, and territorial communities was adopted. Chapters 136 and 139 of the Constitution encompass the basic legal rules that emphasize the new status and roles that civil society must play, urging elected councils to establish mechanisms that ensure effective participation, such as establishing advisory bodies, submitting petitions, and proposing laws.

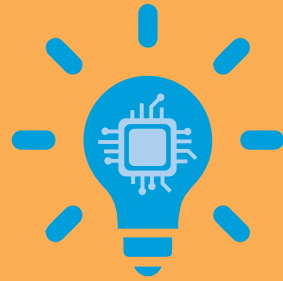
This constitutional provision was considered a response to the protests and popular youth demands expressed by the February 20 Youth Movement, 2011, one of many popular

movements witnessed by the countries of the North African region. Official state channels—royal speeches, official media, and government institutions—often report that these provisions are an expression of a transformation. Indeed, in 2011, the ruling authority in Morocco changed the constitution to include the demands of the February 20 Youth Movement, 2011, the most important of which was to empower civil society and citizens by underlining their right to participation. Moreover, the ruling authority said it would recognize the roles of civil and collective actors in local development and consider them essential partners with the state at the local (basic services), regional (economic and environmental development), and even national (strategic issues) levels. To implement this recognition, in 2016, the state issued a set of measures within local community laws that required local elected councils to involve local associations in the formulation, monitoring, and evaluation of local development, including the implementation of public policies and management of basic local public services such as the distribution of drinking water, school transportation, preschool education, public hygiene, and the like.

### Opportunities and Limits of Participatory Democracy and Youth Representation

Young people in Morocco have tended to emphasize the desire to participate in and belong to associations and political parties (Achraouaou, 2024), recognizing the importance of political actors in influencing developments in the public sphere. However, studies in the Moroccan context mostly cite the youth apathy thesis: Young people do not wish to participate in politics. The low rates of youth participation in the local and legislative elections of 1976 seem to support this argument (Palmer & Nedelcovych, 1984), despite the dynamism of the student movements at this time (El Ayadi, 1999). The idea of youth apathy was still more entrenched following the 1990s (Bourqia et al., 1995). The state continued to believe in youth apathy after the 2007 elections, here based on low youth voting rates. Nevertheless, young people are interested by and drawn to the act of participation—even in terms of voting in elections—but this act is not easy given state exclusion. The political sphere remains inaccessible, particularly to youth due to the monopoly of institutions by traditional and economically influential elites.

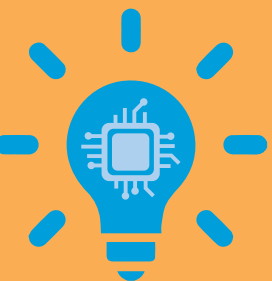
Young people are also not always afforded the chance to prepare socially, economically, psychologically, or cognitively to participate in the public sphere. For this reason young people experience the political sphere as closed; particularly to marginalised young people, in rural, mountainous or suburban areas, where there are few or inaccessible public services. This is important because the more access young people have to public services, availability to educational structures, and access to information, the easier it is for them to engage and participate in the public sphere. Given the difficulty of accessing the sphere of politics, youth tend to search for other forms of participation: they move toward informal forms of influencing politics and advocacy work. They tend to use digital communication in an attempt to influence formal politics from the outside because these spaces are often easier to access in Morocco. Indeed, young people sometimes use social media despite the strict restrictions imposed by traditional institutions, criticizing the status quo and pleading for change in creative, informal ways.



# 5

## NETWORK-BUILDING

**Network-building** is a key strategy for advancing and embedding youth participation in governance processes, including leadership by “opportunity youth” in Mexico City who have been sidelined from education and employment, vulnerable girls and young women empowering themselves to participate in governance in Mombasa, Kenya, engaging young people with disabilities, promoting the inclusion of Afghan youth, exposing Ukrainian young cadets to local and UN governance processes, preventing and countering violent extremism, and bringing young professionals to the centre of organisational governance processes.





# YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE PROCESSES: THE EXPERIENCE OF MEXICO CITY

## Karla Ambrosio

Global Opportunity Youth Network, Mexico City

## Fernanda Rivera

Global Opportunity Youth Network, Mexico City

### Key takeaways:

- Put youth at the heart of your organisation's decision-making and governance, for example, by integrating a youth advisory group into your board.
- Move from the negative narrative of perceiving opportunity youth as lacking to a positive narrative that focuses on their contributions and potential.
- Help youth develop their priorities and plans in relation to public policy.
- Give youth access to decision-makers and opportunities to present their priorities.
- Establish dialogue forums and solution mechanisms where youth and government officials assume responsibility and hold each other accountable for the implementation and outcomes of initiatives.

*“Let nothing limit us. Let nothing define us. Let nothing hold us down. Let freedom be our own substance.”*

Simone de Beauvoir. French writer, teacher and philosopher

While civil society in Mexico has exhibited increasing levels of interest in participating in public decision-making in a proactive and participatory spirit, there remain certain challenges to achieving effective collaboration with the government, particularly in relation to youth engagement. Given the prevailing context, where young people are often excluded from decision-making processes, the primary challenge lies in forging a renewed relationship between (young) citizens and government officials. This new relationship should prioritise dialogue and establish platforms for collaboration and problem-solving, in which both parties assume responsibility and are held accountable for the outcomes.

Although the new mayor of Mexico City has emphasised the youth agenda in her proposals, there remains an urgent need for democratic institutions in Mexico to innovate and respect communication and interaction channels with

youth as well as to co-create effective policies with them at the local, regional and national levels. The strength of marginalised youth and their proposals are part of the solution, and their public participation and promotion of a youth-centred agenda are key to strengthening participatory democracy in Mexico and its capital city.

### “Opportunity Youth”

In Mexico City, there are 2.35 million young people aged 15 to 29 who are considered “opportunity youth”. This term refers to those who demonstrate resilience, creativity and problem-solving abilities despite facing significant structural barriers to education and decent employment. Among this group, 543,000 are out of the educational system, have not been able to complete their higher secondary education and are unemployed. Further, 71% of these “opportunity youth” are women.

Regardless of these challenges, when given opportunities to overcome these barriers and access education and dignified work, these young people can lead more empowered lives, achieve social mobility and contribute to the country's economic growth.

### Moving the Global Opportunity Youth Network from “For Youth” to “By Youth”

The Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN) was launched in Mexico City in 2021 as a multi-stakeholder initiative supported by globally recognised partners, such as the Aspen Institute and the Hilton Foundation. The GOYN is committed to creating systemic changes locally to improve economic opportunities for youth. To achieve its aims, it has focused on building collaborative partnerships, developing programmes tailored to opportunity youth and advocating public policies that address their challenges.

To ensure that GOYN initiatives were not only for the youth but also by the youth as well as youth-led, a youth advisory group (YAG) was integral to the GOYN from the outset. During the launch of the GOYN, the YAG presented their “[Opportunity Youth GOYN Mexico Manifesto](#)”, which emphasises the need to build trustworthy relationships to ensure that youth interests and opinions are heard and that they are valued as agents of change in public policy.

Furthering the intention of the GOYN to be an organisation that is driven by youth



concerns, the YAG strengthened youths' role in strategic planning in 2022. The GOYN created working groups to drive systemic changes, and YAG members were represented in each of these groups. This collaborative effort with government entities, private sector companies and civil society organisations helped define key focus areas, such as improving employment opportunities through private initiatives and public policies, coordinating the employability ecosystem, changing the narrative around youth and increasing youth representation in decision-making spaces.

To ensure a youth-centred governance model, in 2023, the YAG joined the GOYN Board of Directors and Advocacy Committee. In Mexico, opportunity youth are often negatively labelled as “ni-nis” (neither studying nor working), but the YAG redefined this narrative within the GOYN, emphasising their resilience and creativity. By the end of the year, two platforms were launched: [Plataforma JuventudES](#) (YouthES Platform), which connects youth, institutions and decision-makers in Mexico City's employability ecosystem, and [Plataforma Jóvenes X el Emprendimiento](#) (Youth for Entrepreneurship Platform), which provides resources for dignified and sustainable entrepreneurship. In addition, the first [“Advocacy for Youth Employability in Mexico”](#) course was organised by the Youth Advocacy Laboratory project, which was led by *Iniciativa Ciudadana*.

### Advocating for a Public Policy Agenda for Young Opportunity

In 2024, the state of opportunity youth in Mexico City was analysed, and multi-stakeholder working groups were established to define relevant priority areas and identify the key structural barriers they face. Further, the main elements and messages of a public agenda aimed at implementing effective solutions were prioritised. In April, at the public event [“Opportunity Youth in the City: Our Voice, Our Work, Our Advocacy”](#), the YAG presented their [Public Policy Agenda for Opportunity Youth](#), which included the need for multi-sectoral and shared responsibility and collaboration, improvements to the public care system, equal opportunities for decent employment, improved technical and vocational education and second-chance schooling as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship and the social and solidarity economy. They communicated to major political forces in Mexico City that the current public policies had limited reach and budgets, which impacted their effectiveness. They highlighted that these limitations exacerbate inequality and hinder the economic, educational and social development of opportunity youth.

### Innovation Is Not Only Possible, It Is Inevitable

The YAG of the GOYN has proven its ability to drive change, having facilitated proposals for initiatives that have shaped local government

policies for opportunity youth. Rather than only participating in discussions with the government, opportunity youth now engage with government actors regarding an agenda that they created and advocated themselves, with support from a network of organisations. However, the journey is not over. Now, there is a need to ensure that the proposed policies are fully implemented to enhance social and economic inclusion.

From the GOYN in Mexico City, we urge organisations, government bodies and all stakeholders to remain dedicated and proactive. It is essential to turn these achievements by opportunity youth into real benefits for them in order to genuinely promote inclusion and act on youth ideas. Together, let's create a future where their voices lead the way and their dreams can become a reality.

# ENHANCING MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES AMONG VULNERABLE GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN MOMBASA, KENYA

## Peggy Namadi Saka

Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAACR), Coast, Kenya

### Key takeaways:

- Girls and young women (GYW) need to understand that their right to have their voices and views heard and expressed.
- By empowering GYW through civic education, mentorship, and coaching in advocacy and leadership, training in the decision-making processes of governments, civil society, or community elders, they can create their own spaces to fight for their rights and take on leadership positions.
- There needs to be a way to create and implement follow-up processes so that youth can track the progress being made toward the implementation of their priorities.
- All parts of society should take action to overcome negative gender norms and traditions because these inhibit GYW's progress toward leadership, voices being heard, and access decision-making spaces.

In Kenya, we are witnessing a rise in girl and youth-led activism that challenges gender inequality, exclusion, and injustice. Every day, courageous girls and young women unite to amplify their voices and claim their right to be included.

Girls' and young women's (GYW's) rights to engage in public decision-making and freely express themselves are enshrined *de jure* in international agreements as well as in several policies and laws in Kenya. However, *de facto*, most GYW are excluded by governments (local and national) as a result of negative gender norms and practices. It has proven challenging for GYW to engage in decision-making spaces, and their voices are systematically excluded from political and decision-making domains in particular.

For example, GYW who come from vulnerable communities often never have a chance to engage with or contribute to policies affecting their lives because of language and accessibility barriers. Policy documents are often voluminous and written with complex legal or financial jargon, leaving GYW unable to meaningfully contribute or engage. This exclusion is compounded because the majority of these girls have not completed school (teen mothers

are often further stigmatized), therefore, their confidence is impacted by this negativity, and their views are not taken seriously.

### Creating Spaces

However, despite this reality in Kenya, and although civic spaces are closing worldwide, GYW from Mombasa have managed to create spaces at decision-making tables locally and nationally. In 2022, 10 GYW managed to lobby the county government to actively and meaningfully include their views in governance processes and decision-making spaces. To achieve their objective of being heard by authorities, the GYW carried out public campaigns through free radio talk shows in local languages to sensitize the local community to their policy priorities and via social media groups. As they gained momentum, they sent out letters to the Mombasa County Assembly Women Caucus Chair, requesting a face-to-face meeting. Additionally, they engaged with the Clerk and Speaker of the County Assembly of Mombasa.

In the early stages of their process, the GYW used KAACR's Mombasa offices to identify issues pertinent to them, set goals, map stakeholders, and design advocacy strategies. They also held

community outreach sessions calling other GYW in their community to learn about their concerns and contribute to their advocacy plans. The KAACR provided them with support, which included meals and sometimes transportation.

The county government of Mombasa developed its Gender-Based Violence Policy and Framework as well as the Adolescents and Young People (AYP) Policy addressing HIV and Sexual Reproductive Health drafts in 2022. Since the AYP had already passed through all the stages of the parliamentary process, it was launched in 2024. However, because 2022 was an election year in Kenya, the County Assembly of Mombasa was not able to complete the business of the House; thus the GBV policy was not made into law but remained a bill.

### Follow-Up Matters

In 2023, the GYW wanted to follow up on their advocacy determine whether the GBV and AYP policies had been implemented, and share with decision-makers their continued efforts to amplify the voices of the GYW in the county's decision-making. Hence, they decided to hold a meeting with the Women Caucus of the Mombasa County Assembly. Through the KAACR,



several trips were made to the Caucus by the group's leadership.

Finally, the meeting brought together 10 women leaders and 10 GYW at the County Assembly of the Mombasa Committee board room. At this meeting, the chairperson of the Caucus informed the GYW that the bill had to be taken back to the executive because of the formation of a new government. The new government needed to review all the previous policies in the assembly that had not been passed into law by the previous government, including the GBV policy.

Whether the GBV bill advocated for by the GYW will pass into law remains uncertain. However, because of the efforts of the GYW in collaboration with other players in the sector, the Department of Gender has received the request for the GBV draft policy to be brought back to the assembly, and we hope it implemented. The Chairperson of the Women's Caucus and her team promised to follow up on the bill and ensure that it was brought back to the assembly for discussion and voting.

# ENSURING THE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SOCIOPOLITICAL PROCESSES

## Sylvain Obedi

Enable the Disable Action, the Democratic Republic of the Congo

### Key takeaways:

- Policymakers must understand that young people living with disabilities face additional challenges that must be actively accommodated.
- Young people living with disabilities must be provided with educational and mentorship opportunities to help them build the political acumen necessary to effectively engage in political decision-making spaces.
- Beyond rendering physical spaces accessible, it is fundamental that policymakers consider the psychological challenges associated with living with a disability.
- Discrimination against those living with disabilities must be actively addressed.
- Ministries and laws designed to specifically assist those living with disabilities must be consultatively created and implemented.
- International decision-making spaces should be made increasingly accessible, inclusive and multilingual.

Focussing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), this policy paper discusses the meaningful engagement of young people with disabilities in sociopolitical processes.

### Meaningfully Engaging with Youth Living with Disabilities

First, policymakers aiming to meaningfully engage with youth living with disabilities must realize that, whilst it is possible for young people with disabilities to take advantage of training and opportunities, these individuals face additional challenges associated with living with a disability and must be actively accommodated.

### The Need for Adequate Consultation

Young people with disabilities, through their experiences, must be actively involved in the decision-making processes concerning their lives. Politicians should seek their advice to develop relevant policies. For example, as a young person living in a rural area, I have experienced challenges accessing the economic resources needed to obtain appropriate services. Proper consultation would provide a better understanding of our specific needs. It is essential that all laws adopted take into account the views

of the members of the communities concerned, thus ensuring that their voices are heard and integrated into decision-making processes.

### Advice for Political Stakeholders

Meaningful political participation is fundamental for young people living with disabilities. For example, right now in my country—the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—of the 500 deputies in the National Assembly, only one is overtly living with a disability. It is worrying that there are no young people living with disabilities in political decision-making spaces. One starting solution is to provide educational and mentorship opportunities for young people living with disabilities to help them build the political acumen they need to engage effectively in political decision-making spaces.

Right now, too many educational spaces are not inclusive and are not adapted for young people living with disabilities to learn and be prepared to participate in political life. Without an appropriate education, they are not well prepared to be able to devise, share and convince others of their ideas and, as a result, be elected by the electorate. It is even more difficult for them to be able to make a living and have

the economic means to be considered (in the DRC) and become engaged in official national political structures.

### Creating Accessible and Inclusive Educational Systems

Indeed, whether considering informal or formal education spaces, it is important that buildings are adapted for the inclusion of young people living with disabilities. Beyond rendering physical spaces accessible, it is fundamental that their psychological concerns are addressed by actively working to reduce discrimination against those living with disabilities. It is also important that different and specific disabilities are accounted for and accommodated. For example, in my country, whilst some specialised schools provide for blind children, the fact that all teachers are not taught to accommodate blind children means that those who cannot access specialised schools remain illiterate. Without adequate technological access, education is even more difficult. All these realities make it very difficult for young people living with disabilities to access education.



## Enshrining Rights for People Living with Disabilities in the Law

Importantly, in the DRC, the government has established a ministry dedicated to people living with disabilities, with a person living with a disability at the head of the organisation. Thanks to the work of organisations such as mine, the government has recently implemented a new law—Organic Law No. 22/003 of May 2022—that protects the rights of people with disabilities. This law is the result of people advocating at the grassroots level. The law will also create political establishments which will officially take charge of the question of the lives of people living with disabilities, with different decrees already being issued. To develop the law, civil society organisations, experts and international organisations, for example, the United Nations OHCHR, were brought together to produce a first draft of the law, which was eventually passed. The creation of this law and the implementation of this consultative process were important and meaningful and should be replicated.

## Recognise the Many Organisations that Advocate for the Needs of People with Disabilities

I am a youth fellow of the International Disability Alliance (IDA), which engaged in a consultative process that led to the creation of a [10-point call to action to not leave youth with disabilities behind](#). These 10 points are specifically linked to the different topics that will be discussed at the Summit of the Future and should be recognised as the work of an important global movement which brings together people living with disabilities.

### The Importance of Multilingualism

Finally, international decision-making spaces must become increasingly multilingual if they are to be truly inclusive and diverse.

# HOW AFGHANS FOR PROGRESSIVE THINKING (APT) ENGAGES YOUNG WOMEN AND ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

## Ajmal Ramyar

Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT)<sup>1</sup>  
Afghanistan

### Key takeaways:

- Support youth-led initiatives in the country and empower the young people leading them.
- Prioritise education, including international or virtual educational opportunities for girls in Afghanistan.
- Support organisations that work toward youth empowerment in Afghanistan, and amplify their publications and voices.
- Put public pressure on the Taliban government to reduce its repressive policies against youth, especially girls and women.
- Reiterate in the strongest terms that the international community will not accept the continued violations of human rights in Afghanistan.
- Make further resettlement opportunities available for vulnerable Afghans at risk of harm.

Due to the repressive conditions across Afghanistan today, engaging youth—and young women in particular—remains critical but challenging. The only way a peaceful, prosperous Afghanistan is possible is if the next generation of Afghan leaders—today's youth—are educated, supported, and given a platform from which they can share their experiences, their demands, and their solutions to the problems they face.

Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) has used creative initiatives to address these challenges, and we hope the organisation can serve as an example for other countries in similar circumstances.

For the past two decades, APT has worked to build the capacity of youth and foster a culture of youth empowerment in Afghanistan. In August 2021, Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, a perilous turning point for youth and their advocates, particularly women and girls. Until this moment presented a dire threat, young people had achieved many reforms and other steps towards progress. At APT, we were left with two options: find a way to continue supporting youth and believe that a better, alternate future was possible, or watch everything we had worked

for during the last twenty years disappear. Of course, that choice was no choice at all. We have continued to support youth by:

- Providing tailored workshops and dialogue sessions that allow youth to express their experiences and perspectives. We also continued offering mentorship programmes that equipped them with the skills and knowledge to engage in policy discussions and advocacy efforts.
- Inspiring them to continue learning by providing educational opportunities in accessible virtual classrooms
- Connecting them with mentors who could help them frame and achieve their personal and professional goals
- Providing safe online spaces for them to connect and work collectively on creative and solutions-oriented projects
- Providing platforms for them to advocate for their rights on international stages by writing about the realities on the ground
- Publishing their articles, stories, and recommendations through [our website](#),

which amplifies their voices and raises awareness about critical issues such as the role of women in society, educational inequalities, and human rights. These publications provide young women with a platform to contribute to societal changes by influencing public discourse and policy debates.

- Organizing online debates and group discussions through which youth can explore current issues from human rights to democracy and freedom of expression in Afghanistan

It should be noted that innovative approaches are needed to overcome inequalities in education in Afghanistan by focusing on supporting initiatives that help young women access education. It is also necessary to create platforms that amplify young women's voices and provide opportunities for them to access reliable information, connect with each other, propose collective solutions to challenges they face, and expand their access to education, leading to economic innovations in society.



## Beyond Afghanistan's Borders

Moreover, despite the challenges and limited civil society space in Afghanistan, APT extends its influence beyond national borders through various approaches. It participates in international forums, conferences, human rights, peacebuilding, and initiatives related to youth development. By presenting research findings and advocating for policy changes, APT ensures that Afghan perspectives are included in global discussions. APT also uses digital platforms and social media to further its advocacy efforts and connect with global audiences. Doing so enables APT to raise awareness about issues affecting Afghan youth and young women, mobilise support, and build international solidarity.

In addition, APT publishes reports and articles written by programme participants on significant issues affecting Afghanistan and Afghan youth, especially women. These publications contribute to global discussions on human rights, education, and societal progress, enhancing APT's credibility and influence on the international stage. The publications have also helped young authors seeking to build capacity and change attitudes within communities. Moreover, at the national level, the issues that girls and women face in accessing education,

for example, have become sensitive. Our publications also seek to change attitudes, existing legislation, and policy implementation and practice.

Today, Afghan youth urgently need increased international support to help them build a better future for their country. At APT, we believe that the most effective international engagement in Afghanistan involves establishing an enforceable framework that prioritises education, safeguards human rights, and upholds women's rights without compromising or appeasing the *de facto* regime in any way. The absence of such measures has already led to significant repercussions in Afghanistan. Not addressing these issues collectively will result in the further deterioration of human rights and increased instability, potentially leading to a significant displacement of millions more refugees and migrants from Afghanistan.

Finally, as I have learned through my engagements with policymakers and through my participation in various panels internationally, the focus on Afghanistan, Afghan women, and their education is fading. There is a decreasing interest in what is happening in Afghanistan. This lack of interest is concerning, since this lack of international attention towards

Afghanistan will allow the current regime to further undermine human rights, move ahead with its human rights-violating policies, and lead the country into a new catastrophe by providing them with absolute power without any consequences for their actions. Only multilateral international engagement and attention can prevent these phenomena from happening and worsening and simultaneously empower Afghan stakeholders, particularly youth, to determine their country's future. International attention towards Afghanistan in the long run might also end outside support for any faction unwilling to proceed with what the majority of Afghan people deem acceptable.

Thus, the international community must not lose its focus on Afghanistan due to the repressive media environment in the country. This repression is due to the Taliban government controlling the media and people fearing for their lives if they share what is happening inside the country. Civil society organisations in Afghanistan, such as APT, are working increasingly hard to raise public awareness of the situation and educate the international community.

### Footnotes

1. Founded in 2010, Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) is a youth-led nonprofit organisation in Afghanistan, founded in 2010, focused on addressing human rights crises and promoting girls' access to education in Afghanistan. Since its inception, APT has positively impacted over 60,000 youth and children, helping to foster a more peaceful, tolerant society.



# PARTICIPATION OF CADETS OF POLICE ACADEMIES IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS AND THE UNITED NATIONS

## Olena Zhuravska

Cadet, Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs, Ukraine

### Key takeaways:

Youth participation in local governance and the activities of the UN is extremely important for the development of society, strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring a sustainable future, specifically:

- The involvement of cadets of police universities in the activities of local self-government bodies and the UN can develop professional, leadership, and civic skills, which contributes to the construction of an effective and appropriate law enforcement system that meets modern challenges.
- It is important to create platforms for discussing current issues of security, law and order, and international cooperation, which allow young people to feel their involvement in important social processes.
- Cadets of police universities represent a special category.

An important basis of any democratic state is an active, influential, and developed civil society, which plays a key role in the implementation of social changes, effective governance, the management of state affairs, and solving issues of local importance (Zhdanov et al., 2018).

Youth participation in local governance and the activities of the United Nations (UN) is extremely important for developing society, strengthening democratic institutions, and ensuring a sustainable future. Youth, being an active and energetic part of the population, can bring new ideas, innovative approaches, and a fresh perspective to solving modern problems.

Demyan Petryk, deputy executive director of the NGO Youth Platform, noted:

*It is important to involve young people in public activities. However, local authorities are not always able to understand their needs and opportunities. And this is exactly the link that we need to protect and develop, because it has an incredible potential in the restoration of communities. (UNDP in Ukraine, 2024)*

Similarly, I believe that Ukrainian society needs to develop in the field of engagement of young people at local levels of governance, as it helps create the necessary connection between local self-government bodies and young people.

Uniting cadets of police universities around the topic of participation in local government and UN activities is a priority task. This is because working with the younger generation of future police officers is the basis of building an effective law enforcement system that meets modern challenges. This can be achieved through the organization of joint events, seminars, and trainings, where cadets will have the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience. It is important to create platforms for discussing current issues of security, law and order, and international cooperation, which will allow young people to feel their involvement in important social processes.

An important stage is developing the cadets' understanding of what it means to participate in local administration and the activities of the UN. This can be done through writing research papers and essays and by conducting research. Cadets can analyse successful examples of international

cooperation, develop new approaches to law enforcement, and create creative projects that reflect their vision of effective governance and participation in global processes.

To implement ideas and knowledge gained during such discussions and research, cadets can participate in concrete actions. These can include volunteering in projects aimed at supporting local communities, participating in exchange programmes and internships in UN structures, as well as participating in peacekeeping missions. It is important that cadets have the opportunity to apply their knowledge in practice, as this will contribute to their professional growth and development of leadership skills.

Police academy cadets' participation in local administration and UN activities provides an opportunity not only to gain practical experience but also to contribute to the development of civil society, the protection of human rights, and the maintenance of peace. The participation of cadets of police universities in local administration and UN activities is an important component of their professional training, contributing both to their personal

development and to effective local governance. This might also serve to increase the authority of Ukraine in the international arena. The participation of cadets in the activities of the UN and local government shows Ukraine's desire to integrate into the world community, observing international standards in the field of human rights and ensuring law and order and democracy. This demonstrates to international partners Ukraine's commitment to the principles of the rule of law and democratic values. Active participation of cadets in UN programmes and initiatives contributes to the establishment of relations with foreign colleagues and to exchanges of experience and best practices in the field of security and law enforcement.

Such activities also help strengthen the image of Ukraine as a reliable partner ready for cooperation at the international level. The involvement of cadets in UN activities can contribute to their preparation for participation in peacekeeping missions and other international initiatives. A high level of training of cadets through participation in local government and UN activities will contribute to strengthening Ukraine's internal stability, which positively affects its international image as a country capable of ensuring security and law

and order. Through unity, understanding, and concrete actions, cadets can become the driving force of positive changes in our country.

Involving young people in decision-making ensures a more representative democracy where the interests of all age groups are taken into account. It also promotes trust in local authorities by young people as well as increases their legitimacy. Participation in UN activities provides an opportunity to gain a global perspective on solving world problems. Young people involved in international projects and programmes gain valuable experience in intercultural communication, which contributes to the strengthening of international cooperation and mutual understanding.

# HOW CAN YOUNG PEOPLE BE MEANINGFULLY INVOLVED IN PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM? THE EXAMPLE OF THE RAN YOUNG PLATFORM

## Constance Munch

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) YOUNG Platform, Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), France and Switzerland

### Key takeaways:

- Deliberately open and make spaces for diverse young people who are interested in an issue to meet, exchange views and workshop practical recommendations.
- Give young people access to frontline practitioners and relevant stakeholders through their participation in large-scale events.
- Provide opportunities for young people to take proactive action within their own communities or professions.

Following a wave of distressing violent extremist attacks in France around 2015/2016, I began to closely study the phenomenon of violent extremism. In doing so, I increasingly wondered whether the responses provided were really capable of combating the roots of radicalisation and worried they increased stigmatisation and polarisation. I also asked myself many questions regarding the ethical issues involved in the so-called global “war on terror”. However, the mechanisms for understanding these issues in depth felt relatively inaccessible because of the securitised nature of the subject and difficulty of finding cutting-edge information related to these issues.

Now working in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism, my professional experience has allowed me to access new opportunities to deeply understand the phenomenon of violent extremism. Specifically, in 2023, I was invited to join the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)<sup>1</sup>. RAN, its members and the ability to interact with experts have been valuable for young people like me who are

looking to meaningfully engage with a sensitive subject such as this.

### Being Part of an International Network

The RAN YOUNG Platform connects youth from all over Europe who are working in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism, enabling them to exchange with frontline practitioners and policymakers and, for example, to formulate ways for preventing and countering violent extremism recommendations for public and local authorities. Meetings are conducted in person as well as online, sometimes only between RAN YOUNG youth and, at other times, with European preventing and countering violent extremism practitioners, too. We pay close attention to violent extremism-related developments in the EU as our primary focus. Our meetings almost always involve group work beforehand, and agendas are set according to the areas of interest we have expressed.

Engaging with people our own age with different backgrounds is interesting and ensures we

build a comprehensive, locally contextualised understanding of the problems encountered in tackling preventing and countering violent extremism.

### Improving Our Knowledge and Skills in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

RAN YOUNG also aims to assist young researchers to optimise their research approaches and understanding of how they can contribute to various preventing and countering violent extremism efforts. For example, we were taught how to gather empirical evidence that can usefully inform evidence-based programming.

We also improve our knowledge and skills by exchanging with our peers. In October 2023, the staff running RAN YOUNG organised an online meeting that brought together 23 young people from 10 European Union countries to discuss and capture what we, as young people, felt were the most pressing issues facing the EU based on our personal experiences and perspectives. Our



discussions are open and honest, thanks to the [Chatham House rule](#).

### Having the Opportunity to Be Heard by Practitioners and Policymakers

As mentioned, our participation in working group meetings brings us into contact with frontline practitioners, enabling us to communicate our recommendations directly to them, allowing them to leverage young people's insights and offering them meaningful avenues for diverse experiential learning opportunities.

Indeed, in April 2024, I was afforded the opportunity to present the RAN YOUNG Platform's work at Europol's annual conference on [Gen Z and \(counter-\)terrorism](#) in front of 200 representatives of many law enforcement agencies in Europe. This gave me the sense that our work had a purpose and that we were being heard. Through direct contact with policymakers, law enforcement officers and frontline experts and practitioners involved in preventing and countering violent extremism at the European level, RAN has provided me—and I believe my 22 RAN YOUNG youth colleagues, too—with a platform through which to be heard and feel listened to. We can share our youth-led approach to and understanding of violent extremism—which sometimes differs from the

primary concerns of public authorities—directly with those same authorities.

### Discover the Importance of Building a Network

Through our many discussions, I felt that we were able to build a common evidence base of resources and information of interest to us all. However, because we also all represent different countries, experiences, backgrounds and cultural origins, we also share and gain an understanding of varied, discrete local experiences. Indeed, I think we were selected to participate in the RAN YOUNG Platform based on our potential to learn from one another.

Our [latest product](#) as a group is a guide for young people to help them deal with issues of polarisation, hate speech, hate crime and mental health in relation to preventing and countering violent extremism. RAN not only gives us a voice but also teaches us how to formulate recommendations in a collaborative and consensual way, as well as how to do research that is useful for addressing these critical issues.

#### Footnotes

1. The [RAN](#) is a network of frontline practitioners who work daily with both those vulnerable to radicalisation and those who have already been radicalised. As civil society representatives, social workers, youth workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, local authority representatives, police officers and prison officers, they are engaged in both preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms and rehabilitating and reintegrating violent extremists. Since it was founded in 2011, the RAN has attracted over 6,000 practitioners, who collectively represent all EU Member States.

# YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

## Shreyan Acharya

Central Square Foundation, India

(All views expressed here are my own)

Collaborative participation in development efforts across domains can positively revolutionise development processes (Cornwall, 2011). Different actors, such as civil society organisations, government stakeholders and public-spirited individuals, can collaborate to drive development goals. Such partnerships add significant value to redefining development by bringing concerned stakeholders together to deliberate on its future (UNESCO, 2021). One approach to collaborative participation is to mainstream youth engagement in national and local development and governance processes. In fact, development processes have gained a fresh outlook owing to the increased involvement of youths in their governance processes, and this increased involvement has led to the “professionalisation of the youth as development practitioners” (Acharya & Kapoor, 2023).

Such youths—whom I will refer to as “young professionals”—come from diverse socio-economic and academic backgrounds and are mostly in the early stages of their careers. In India, young professionals interested in the development space sometimes receive the opportunity to engage with state governments to implement impact-driven projects at scale. They collaborate with government stakeholders across different states to provide systemic support for programme implementation

for various projects. For example, for the implementation of the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN), the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) introduced MP NIPUN Professionals, wherein young professionals work locally in the district to support the initiative. In this case, young professionals contribute to development and governance, acting as implementers or “[development agents](#)”.

### Young Professionals for Systemic Support

The introduction of fellowship programmes and consultancy opportunities by governments, where young graduates or professionals in the early stages of their career act as “implementers” of critical government and NGO policies, has enhanced the involvement of youth in providing systemic support—especially at the grassroots level—to drive key government policies. It is understood that these professionals receive a platform to begin their professional learning with hands-on experience, which adds significant value to their professional trajectory, while simultaneously supporting their further academic journey by affording them grassroots experience in the field.

Through their engagement with different government departments, such as education, these young people can exercise some influence and autonomy to drive reforms through their direct participation in setting up structured processes, establishing monitoring mechanisms and helping institutionalise new data-driven review processes. Their skills and expertise fill capacity gaps in governance processes. Simultaneously, their participation becomes an important benchmark for the development sector’s inclusion of young professionals in the wider government system, allowing them the scope to learn by being exposed to government processes. Engagement with these systems also helps young professionals develop a broader perspective with regard to comprehending practical development and governance challenges as they occur, thereby helping them become ever better problem-solvers. Young professionals’ engagement is often target-oriented; in the best-case scenario, conducting regular reviews at various levels to assess their effectiveness and provide space for dialogue and growth helps avoid tokenism. Overall, while the accountability of the young professionals is towards their government stakeholders, they are able to take full ownership of the tasks they intend to accomplish.

### Key takeaways:

- Foster collaborative participation by different stakeholders for participatory development.
- Enhance professionalisation of youth participation in the development process.
- Empower young professionals as development agents providing systemic support for governance.



## Participatory Governance in India

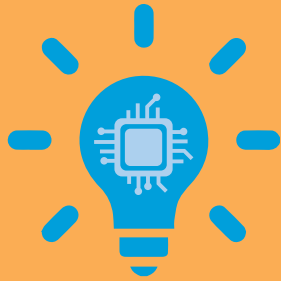
Establishing and securing the involvement of young professionals in governance processes requires collaborative effort that includes the participation of visionary government leaders and support from civil society and social sector organisations. Such concerted effort involves political leaders, government bureaucrats and organisational leaders working together to formulate mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of young professionals. Various state governments identify different development challenges and aim to involve individuals with strong problem-solving abilities to address them.

The young professionals are recruited either directly by the government on fixed tenures or indirectly by external organisations such as NGOs. Some examples of these programmes include the Chief Minister's Good Governance Associates Programme (CMGGA) in Haryana, MP NIPUN Professionals in Madhya Pradesh and the previously active Change Maker in Education (CMIE) programme in Delhi. The government of Delhi initiated the CMIE programme, which was operational until June 2023, and provided opportunities to young professionals to engage with the educational reforms implemented in Delhi, India (Bansal & Roy, 2021). Primary research was conducted in 2022 with the support of the then-serving fellows and programme managers to understand how young professionals could become development agents. The key observation was that the participants acknowledged the significance of

youth engagement in the governance process by highlighting youths' positive role as influencers in education governance, enhancing the quality of interventions and addressing the mismatch in policies by being at the forefront of real-life situations. The youth achieved this by supporting government stakeholders with designing and implementing programmes that were effective for government school students, with a focus on early childhood education, enhancing student leadership and innovative curriculums centred on entrepreneurship. Moreover, it was acknowledged that the practical exposure and connectivity to the governance process shifted the development outlook of the country's youth towards a stronger feeling of nation-building and civic responsibility.

Owing to their academic diversity, exposure to actual facts and opportunity to closely engage with bureaucrats and officials, these young professionals were able to demonstrate their capabilities for catalysing and spearheading approaches as development agents to obtain a holistic outlook with respect to education at the governance and implementation levels. Furthermore, the values of participatory democracy and public-spiritedness were ingrained in the youths through their exposure to practical challenges and realities.

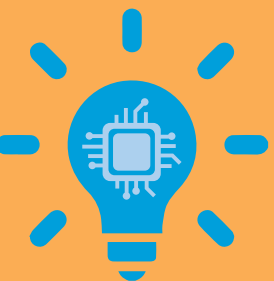
In sum, youth engagement in national or local governance processes has the potential to transform the development sector, effectively supporting youth professionalisation through bottom-up approaches to enable them to act as agents of change.



# 6

## CONVENING

By **convening**, it is possible to unite generations in novel ways and use digital tools creatively in order to share power to transform education, address missed opportunities with youth, create spaces for youth agency and leadership, position youth at the cutting edge of internet governance in India, co-design the future of learning, and empower youth through collaborative pathways for change.



# UNITING GENERATIONS AND SHARING POWER TO TRANSFORM EDUCATION

## Jorina Sendel

YouthxYouth, Germany

## Eva Keiffenheim

Big Change, Germany

### Key takeaways:

- Address power dynamics in convening spaces. Design and facilitate space to enable more collaborative forms of power to create the possibility for more equitable discussions, dialog, and decision-making.
- Understand that taking an intergenerational approach means redefining conventional roles and helping everyone to be a learner or teacher, a follower or leader.
- Intergenerational collaboration should be promoted during gatherings by incorporating designs to facilitate such collaboration throughout, from the early planning stages through the evaluation.

*“Creating a true intergenerational group means engaging people with different experiences, in different stages of life, and from different contexts.”*

Jorina Sendel, aged 23, YouthxYouth

Despite the [UN’s call](#) to build young people’s ownership in transforming education, practical strategies for intergenerational power sharing are lacking. In response to this challenge, Salzburg Global Seminar and Big Change brought together more than 10 organizations for an in-person convening on the issue in May 2023. These organizations cocreated [a guide for Uniting Generations and Sharing Power](#) for all those committed to sharing power and taking an inclusive approach to transforming education.

### What Do We Mean When We Say “Uniting Generations” and “Sharing Power”?

Generations are groups of individuals born and raised during the same period. Labels such as Gen Z, Millennials, and Baby Boomers are convenient but [not scientifically precise](#), often leading to stereotypes. Nonetheless, understanding trends across generational cohorts can provide some insight into

how shared experiences shape collective perspectives and behaviors. Elder generations are considered to wield power over youth. Nevertheless, thinking differently about power can help overcome this traditional view:

- **Power over** others by one group or individual, including adults over youth, is associated with authority and dominance, often embedded in institutions and hierarchies.
- **Power within** refers to an individual’s internal strength and self-awareness, enabling them to stand up for their beliefs and values.
- **Power to** is about the capacity to make decisions, take action, and influence others to effect change and achieve goals.
- **Power with** is collaborative power, derived from collective action and community involvement, that enables groups to achieve together what they cannot achieve alone.

Expanding, questioning, and redefining our definition of power allows for intergenerational collaboration. This approach recognizes that

everyone can be a teacher, a learner, a follower, and a leader.

### Uniting Generations and Sharing Power in Practice

Intergenerational collaboration in leadership is being practiced by many organizations, including the [Big Education Conversation](#), which was started in the UK by Big Change.

The Big Education Conversation supports communities to come together to talk about the purpose of education across generations and generate ideas and commitments for transforming education. The initiative’s goal is to ignite and support at least a million local, regional, and national conversations around the world by offering open-source, accessible online tools and resources to discuss education [in eight languages](#).

### “Power Over” versus “Power With” Conversations about Education

Traditional conversations about education often reflect “power over” dynamics, where decision-making tends to be influenced by more experienced individuals who may, often unconsciously, control the agenda and speak





over younger voices. These settings are typically formal, with predetermined agendas that limit spontaneous input and diverse viewpoints. When young people are invited, it is often into adult-created spaces, with rules for behavior that can limit their ability to fully and openly participate. As a result, such structures can reinforce existing power imbalances, hindering genuine dialog and collective action.

In contrast, the Big Education Conversation integrates “power with” to create a collaborative environment where all participants, regardless of age, can contribute equally. Big Education Conversations recognize the importance of “power within,” encouraging individuals to share their unique insights and experiences confidently. By redistributing “power to” all participants, Big Education Conversations ensure that younger voices are heard and valued in shaping conversations around education. Each participant is given the opportunity to be heard and seen in their unique way because the conversation design ensures that everyone has time to contribute. For example, [facilitators use specific tools](#) like talking sticks and timers to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and arrange conversations in circles to promote equal participation and eye-level interaction.

*“I have hosted a Big Education Conversation with primary school children in Uganda, and it was amazing to just listen to them about their ideas on the purpose of education”*

*(Eunice Lynda Nakaibale, Uganda).*

### The Structure of Intergenerational Big Education Conversations

Big Education Conversations involve diverse age groups and identities—students, parents, educators, policymakers, and more. Big Education Conversations are structured to facilitate open dialog through a sequence of reflective and imaginative stages.

Participants start by introducing themselves and sharing their intentions, which builds connection. They then reflect on their beliefs about the purpose of education, uncovering shared themes and diverse views. Afterward, they brainstorm ways to redesign education, here encouraging creativity. The session wraps up with participants committing to concrete actions, ensuring that the conversation leads to real changes in their communities.

Big Education Conversations can be hosted anywhere, from cafes to classrooms, and from parks to [stages at the United Nations](#). This flexibility ensures that the conversations are context specific and relevant, unlocking meaningful experiences that build trust and encourage active listening. Being adaptable for larger groups, with the largest hosting 400 people, these conversations have occurred in more than 33 countries, involving thousands overall.

After each Big Education Conversation, the hosts capture and share the insights and commitments made, contributing to a broader movement for educational change. Participants are encouraged to share their experiences on social media via hashtags such as #BigEdConversation and to add their conversation to the global map. This amplifies the impact of individual conversations and helps build a global network of intergenerational change-makers committed to transforming education.

**Figure 8**  
Ways to Understand Power



Source: [Uniting Generations and Sharing Power to Transform Education Guide](#)

# UNTAPPED POTENTIAL: THE UNITED NATIONS' MISSED CONNECTION WITH YOUTH

## Alexander Dietz

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### Key takeaways:

- Open a forum to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas with MUN conferences.
- Provide in-kind assistance to MUN conferences and their participants (e.g., venues or access to staff experts and networks).
- Increase the presence of the UN in classrooms and curricula in high schools and universities.

In recent years, it has become evident that students and youth are increasingly aware of their role and impact on politics and policy, as seen with [youth climate movements](#). They are tackling issues such as political instability, inequalities, and climate change, often driven by the realization that their future is at stake. Although the United Nations (UN) tries to increase youth participation through youth ambassadors with genuine success, these efforts are limited and fail to address youth engagement at scale. This is particularly frustrating, as there is tremendous untapped potential for the UN to connect with youth, such as through **Model United Nations (MUN)**.

MUN is an educational simulation of the UN that allows participants to engage with global issues and educate themselves on international affairs and policymaking. Students take on the roles of UN Member States and interact in debates with their peers to find resolutions to pressing issues. They dedicate months of their free time to organizing these events, typically lasting 2–3 days.

Through their efforts in organizing and participating in MUN, students experience exceptional [personal growth that is invaluable](#)

[in life](#). They learn to build consensus, (often) debate in a foreign language, and build a diverse network of driven changemakers around the globe. Many students engaging in MUN have attested to becoming fans of the UN, learning about its work, and priding themselves on their knowledge of the sustainable development goals.

Therefore, we, as the authors of this essay, are devoted to every student participating in an MUN conference in their student life. To achieve this, we run mymun.com, a [shared platform](#) to support and grow the global MUN community. Our platform centrally lists conferences, making them accessible to participants and easy to host for organizers. With 300,000 registered users from more than 190 countries and over 6,000 listed conferences, looking for the next MUN on mymun.com has become synonymous with googling for information.

Despite these successes, the potential of MUN cannot be realized without the UN's involvement. We advocate for three key initiatives the UN system should tap into to realize the potential of MUN for creating advocates for a multilateral order at scale.

### Recommendations for Key Actors

In September 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted A/RES/77/336, their first [resolution](#) on MUN. The resolution recognizes the important contribution of MUN to diplomacy and international cooperation and encourages further support by Member States and the UN system. Although the resolution raised hopes for increased attention, the current lack of implementation makes the following three recommendations even more imperative:

#### 1. (M)-UN Dialogue

The UN wants to learn from young people and include their voices in decision-making processes, as highlighted in the [UN Youth Agenda 2030](#). At the same time, young people are interested in what is currently being discussed at the UN. MUN can provide a forum to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas. A model where UN agencies suggest topics to be discussed with preparatory background information allows agencies to share and discuss their strategic priorities with the public, increase immersion for students, and mentor students so that the debates



are of high quality. Simultaneously, youth can more easily advocate for and exchange the outcomes of their discussions directly with policymakers, showcasing their new perspectives and innovative ideas.

This mechanism had already been applied in the [MUN Refugee Challenge](#), in which—for several years—the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) annually provided four relevant topics with background guides to MUN conferences. Students could contact UNHCR experts to learn more about the topics and submit their resolutions directly to the UNHCR. Unfortunately, budget cuts forced the UNHCR to discontinue the program.

## 2. Operational Assistance Beyond Funding

Most MUN conferences are organized by students for students on a non-profit basis. Organizers fight hard to allow for low participation fees, but venues' costliness can substantially drive up prices. Thus, the UN system and its Member States

should provide direct assistance to youth by, for example, providing locations for debate, connecting them to speakers, and financing scholarships to enable students to participate in conferences.

The International Labour Organization is a role model of an engaged UN agency in this respect. They provide rooms and speakers for the [Geneva International MUN](#) without much additional financial cost or effort. We expect more UN agencies to open their doors and allow students to use their venues.

## 3. Academia

The UN needs to increase its presence in classrooms and curricula. Initiatives could include cooperation with universities and high schools to assist educators in preparing classes on the UN and its priorities and workings. Such efforts are valuable, especially at institutions without an explicit political focus, such as engineering or business schools.

A recent example is the German state of Bavaria, which decided to make participation in at least one political simulation mandatory for every high school student. Young people and the UN can particularly gain from mutually beneficial collaborations if those simulations happen to be MUN conferences.

MUN may not be a magic formula for changing the world, yet it changes the people who will change the world by fostering their critical thinking, enhancing diplomatic skills, and cultivating a deep understanding of global issues. By addressing all three proposed recommendations, the UN and its Member States would not only adequately implement their resolution but also close the gap between current and future policymakers, thus tapping into an overlooked part of meaningful youth engagement.

# FESTIVAL OF HOPE: CREATING SPACES FOR YOUTH AGENCY AND LEADERSHIP

## Jennifer Bahrami

Festival of Hope on behalf of International Baccalaureate, USA

## Tim Logan

Festival of Hope on behalf of International Baccalaureate, United Kingdom

## Ziyaan Virji

Festival of Hope on behalf of International Baccalaureate, Canada

### Key takeaways:

- Start with a clear set of principles to guide your work, principles that reflect your and young people's purpose. Ours are community, inspiration, action and, of course, hope!
- Be intentional in the design of youth-driven efforts to ensure all voices are heard, and identify older generations and professionals involved who are empowered to protect the youth-led principles when they are challenged.
- Focus on authentic listening, and maintain a learning disposition to enhance the sense of connectedness within and between generations.
- Design for collaborative problem solving in order to anchor gatherings towards collaboration and sharing collective creativity and agency.
- Don't be afraid to leave spaces for the emergence of inquiry and dialogue. Allow for the unknown. Connections, relationships, and insights often emerge in the spaces where they are allowed to flourish.

It is evident from the way they show up in person and online that Gen Z and Gen Alpha value collaboration and community (Katz et al., 2021). Young people have told educators and International Baccalaureate (IB) staff involved in various Festival of Hope events that they frequently feel older generations are not bringing them into the fold: that they are often being talked to but not spoken with and that they are expected to bear the burdens of our current and future challenges but not invited into the spaces where they might participate in building solutions impacting them the most.

Centred in community, inspiration, and action, the Festival of Hope is an initiative created by the IB that aims to create in-person and virtual spaces for millions of young people to share and explore what it takes to transform complex challenges and structural inequities through positive hope and action. Since 2022, the Festival of Hope has engaged over 7,000 students in over 300 schools across the globe. Whilst there is one Festival of Hope, how it is designed has been diverse. Whilst in one context, the Festival can be a conference, in another, it can be a series of workshops and, in yet another, expressions of art. Overall, it is an

intergenerational inquiry, co-created between youth and IB educators, that is centred around questions and reflections, with the aim of collaboratively reaching understandings about issues that young people feel strongly about.

The Festival of Hope has brought together diverse people with varied experiences, hosting interviews, workshops, and opportunities for action through collaboration with organizations like Roots & Shoots or the Global Youth Action Fund, for example. From schools across Chicago, USA, to schools in the cities of Mumbai and New Delhi, India, to the rainforests near San José, Costa Rica, the Festival of Hope has represented something similar yet localized and unique to the thousands of youth who have participated.

A key part of the process for a Festival of Hope gathering is the host IB educators and IB association leaders inviting a youth committee to form, who then take the lead on planning and implementing the kind of space they want to convene. This includes deciding on the themes that they care deeply about and determining the format, guests, and experiences that will constitute their unique Festival.





# YOUTH AT THE HELM OF INTERNET GOVERNANCE

## Members of the Working Group on Youth Empowerment, Global Research and Action Network for a New Eco-Social Contract<sup>1</sup>

### Key takeaways:

- Provide a facilitated platform for youth to allow them to network and collaboratively learn about cutting-edge issues, such as cybersecurity and digital rights, through, for example, workshops, training sessions and mentorship programs.
- Enable youth to contribute to global policy dialogue and advocacy through varied initiatives, including webinars, youth track sessions, traditional conference sessions, stakeholder consultations, the publication of youth-authored policy papers and reports, and social media campaigns.
- Offer networking opportunities and skill development to enhance the ability of young people to engage with impact in governance settings.
- Encourage international forums that are working on the same topic to actively seek out and engage with youth chapters that are working at the national and local levels.

In an era in which digital landscapes are rapidly evolving, the active participation of youth in technology governance has become increasingly vital. This involvement is crucial for developing new—and necessary—eco-social contracts that are grounded in broad participation, dialogue and consensus-building to ensure sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth for all.

The [Youth Internet Governance Forum India](#) (YIGFI) empowers young individuals to engage in meaningful dialogue and action concerning internet governance.

### Enhancing Youth Awareness and Policy Influence

Established in 2018, the YIGFI empowers young individuals to engage in internet governance. It enhances youth awareness of and influence in developing information communication technology related public policies and technological advancements. YIGFI provides a platform for young Indians to discuss the societal, policy and technological implications of the internet, supporting robust eco-social contracts. These contracts are agreements that balance economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability and can be achieved, in part, by ensuring inclusive and equitable internet governance policies that

reflect the diverse needs of society. YIGFI agenda items are determined in consultation with the government, civil society, technology sectors and academia.

### Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

YIGFI strives to raise youth awareness on internet governance issues and encourage them to participate in informed technological developments and public policy discussions. To realise this vision, YIGFI engages youth through:

- Workshops providing comprehensive internet-related training, including group discussions, case studies and best practice analysis
- Fellowships providing the opportunity to be mentored by experts, contribute to tech-policy recommendations and receive financial support to attend the YIGFI Annual Forum<sup>2</sup> in person

### Policy Discussions

Initiated in 2018, annual YIGFI meetings provide opportunities for youth participants to engage with leaders from government, civil society, industry, think tanks and academia. These interactions foster meaningful deliberations by engaging youth and other stakeholders in

framing policies on critical topics, such as cyber security, AI regulation, digital inclusion and more.

### Broadening Discussions and Reducing Digital Inequalities

By encouraging and providing spaces for the engagement of younger generations, the YIGFI broadens discussions on internet governance, promoting awareness primarily among young people and fostering a diverse and inclusive understanding of challenges such as the digital divide (i.e. divides in access, skill and productive use). Through intergenerational dialogues, young people not only learn from experienced stakeholders but also contribute their own fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, enriching the overall discourse on internet governance. Through policy advocacy, the YIGFI also strives to reduce access-based digital inequalities, reduce internet costs and leverage India's demographic dividend in the digital realm. YIGFI addresses digital inequalities by advocating for affordable internet access, promoting digital literacy and harnessing India's youthful population to drive inclusive growth in the digital economy.

### Recognition and Collaboration with IGF

The unique and proactive role played by YIGFI in addressing relevant internet governance



issues in the Indian context and engaging youth in shaping policies and initiatives related to youth and internet governance has, in the past, brought recognition from the [United Nations Internet Governance Forum](#) (IGF)<sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, the major outcomes emerging from YIGFI's consultative discussions are ultimately communicated to the IGF for inclusion in global policies. On a global scale, the IGF plays a crucial role in facilitating understanding of and consensus on digital public policy, governance mechanisms and emerging technologies. It enhances cooperation among key organisations and stakeholders involved in various digital domains, aiming for maximal inclusion in the policy discourse, particularly from under-represented countries and groups. As such, importantly, YIGFI's collaboration with the IGF means that the concerns of Indian youth are considered on the global stage and in the development of global policies.

### Global Representation and Youth Track

Representatives who are chosen based on their expertise and contributions to internet governance and allied fields from multiple national-level IGFs, including the YIGFI, participate in discussions and debates around internet governance during the IGF annual meetings. Young people participate in these meetings in a dedicated "youth track." For example, the 2023 IGF youth track focused on building youth capacity in cybersecurity and trust, fostering networks and enhancing

collaboration among youth-driven internet governance initiatives.

### Shaping the Digital Future

YIGFI helps to facilitate the representation of youth on the international stage and provides a powerful example of how young people can engage in and shape the digital future. By facilitating comprehensive discussions and doing practical advocacy work, YIGFI bridges the gap between young people and decision-makers in the realm of internet governance. As we look towards creating inclusive and forward-thinking policies, the contributions and insights gained from youth-led initiatives are indispensable. YIGFI's work underscores the significance of incorporating youth perspectives into global and national governance processes, ultimately driving towards a more inclusive and equitable digital world. Active participation in YIGFI has influenced internet governance policies in India, enhanced digital literacy and internet access, and shaped global discussions on cybersecurity and digital rights, empowering youth to drive inclusive outcomes locally and internationally.

#### Footnotes

1. The Working Group on Youth Empowerment for an Eco-Social Contract offers a platform to its members for the exchange of ideas, as well as opportunities for research, social dialogue and advocacy. It empowers youth to become active agents of positive change by contributing to shaping policies and practices that support an eco-social contract for sustainable and equitable development. Correspondence to [Sumit Kumar Maji](#).
2. For example, this year, the YIGFI Annual Forum is scheduled to be held at IIM Bangalore on 30 September, 2024.
3. The [IGF recognizes national and youth IGFs](#) through a structured process on applications made by not-for-profit organizations that ensures that these forums align with the global IGF's principles of inclusive, multi-stakeholder participation in internet governance.

# CO-DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING WITH YOUTH

## Ed Stevenette

Coordinator of LearningPlanet Youth, France

## Miya Manu Abraham

LearningPlanet Youth Fellow and Community Lead, France

### Key takeaways:

- Involve young people in shaping their educational environments. The LearningPlanet Youth Fellows tangibly demonstrate the potential benefits of employing this co-design approach. This model not only recognises but also amplifies the innovative potential of youth.
- Prepare youth to become proactive designers of a more inclusive and sustainable future and incubate their projects by facilitating their learning of design thinking and fundraising.
- Bring youth to the global stage by providing them with online access to global meetings and by showcasing and connecting them and their work. We urge educational institutions, policymakers and international bodies to genuinely engage with, listen and design alongside young people to transform the educational landscape and render it more inclusive and adaptive to local and global challenges. Join us in this journey!

Imagine a future where education seamlessly meets the evolving needs of society and where the future is crafted by youth. At the Learning Planet Institute,<sup>1</sup> we aspire to make this a reality. We collaborate with youth visionaries to co-design their educational journey and, through this, impact education systems more broadly.

The LearningPlanet [community](#) programme is at the heart of this approach, recognising over 500 young educational changemakers from more than 75 countries and encouraging them to develop educational initiatives that reflect their diverse needs, ambitions and innovative ideas.

### Engaging Youth in Global Conversations

During the United Nations General Assembly 2023, LearningPlanet Youth Fellows took centre stage to explore the [future of higher education](#). The session explored visions for an educational institution where learning would be continuous, project-driven and community-focused and sparked a broader conversation about building new types of universities that would be adapted to worldwide transitions. This was taken further at the UNESCO Youth Forum in November, where youth members facilitated a university design session with UNESCO national youth delegates.

### A Design Challenge for University Programmes of the Future

We deepened our commitment to youth crafting their educational journey through the [Learning Planet Youth Design Challenge](#), in which we invited young people from over 30 countries to reimagine university education. Participants pitched ideas for learning programmes focused on the themes of flourishing, engagement and sustainability. An international jury selected 20 finalists from the innovative proposals received, of which three winners were chosen and featured at the LearningPlanet Festival 2024. We are supporting these finalists through a six-month incubator programme, which focuses on educational strategies, design thinking and fundraising skills.

### Supporting the Implementation of Youth-Led Learning Programmes in Education Systems

By integrating youth-led learning programmes into educational systems, we can help establish policies and practices that are inclusive, forward-thinking and meaningfully tailored to young people's needs. This was particularly evident at the [ECOSOC Youth Forum 2024](#), where finalists of the aforementioned global design

challenge showcased their submissions to UN delegates. These finalists were:

- Daniel Persky (USA), who presented his Sustainable Development Career Programme designed for climate resilience;
- Jay Liu (Hong Kong), who promoted Ad Bonam Fidem: The Appeal to Good Faith, a structured approach to conflict resolution;
- Jiatong Han (China), who founded Nexovatel, which aimed to unite global youth to innovate at the nexus of science, technology and society with a focus on ethical solutions;
- Ruonan Zhao (Canada), who shared Fuelling Futures, which was designed to create safe and enjoyable learning environments; and
- Siyona Bordia (USA), who highlighted RightfullyHers, raising awareness about gender-based disparities in health and other sectors.

### Tackling Access to the Global Stage

Accessing global decision-making entities remains a serious challenge due to funding, visa restrictions and other logistical barriers. In addition, often the language of international





diplomacy and decision-making is not accessible for local community youth actors.

We are trying to address these challenges as a part of our learning journey by taking the following actions:

1. Developing our [projects platform](#) to showcase and meaningfully connect the projects undertaken by young people from around the world and publicise their stories as young gamechangers
2. Encouraging access to and participation in global meets through online sessions, which was exemplified by Bui Gia Khahn presenting her learning programme to 200 delegates online at the Global Schools Programme during ECOSOC
3. Connecting young people with each other through programmes and collaborative workshops to foster a community of shared learning and mutual support

#### Footnote

1. Based in Paris, the Learning Planet Institute is an interdisciplinary learning community that explores and shares new ways of cooperating that respond to the needs of the youth and the planet. Its mission is to co-design the future of learning with youth and develop innovative solutions for a more sustainable world. Since 2019, in partnership with UNESCO, the Learning Planet Institute has run the LearningPlanet Alliance, which encourages concrete collaboration between hundreds of partners worldwide for rethinking education.

# EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES: COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

## Lilia Touil

ONE Youth Ambassador, GPE French National Youth Leader Alumna, Global Youth Activist with Theirworld, France

### Key takeaways:

- **Institutionalise youth participation:** Systematically integrate youth voices at all policymaking levels, as exemplified by ONE's Youth Ambassador programme.
- **Empower youth leadership:** Ensure that youth lead discussions on climate change, healthcare, and economic development e.g., through the EU–Africa Youth Task Force.
- **Leverage youth advocacy:** Establish permanent platforms for youth engagement and collaborate with initiatives such as ONE Youth Ambassadors for impactful changes.

### Introduction: Addressing Inequalities through Youth Engagement

As a law student with a double master's degree in international and European law as well as digital law, my choice of studies has been deeply influenced by my personal experiences. Growing up in a marginalised community, I witnessed early on the stark inequalities that persist, particularly in France's poorest neighbourhoods. These disparities, often rooted in colonial legacies, are still visible today in societal perceptions, public policies, and the opportunities afforded to young people. It is this lived reality that guided me towards pursuing study in these areas and ultimately fuelled my commitment to advocate for justice and equality. This journey led me to join the ONE Campaign, an organisation dedicated to empowering youth and fostering a more balanced and just EU–Africa partnership.

### The ONE Campaign: Mobilising Youth for Global Change

ONE empowers young people to campaign for a [balanced EU–Africa partnership](#), focusing on fostering sustainable development, strengthening diplomatic ties, and creating equitable trade.

These efforts address resource dependency and open markets to benefit both regions.

As a young woman connected to both continents, I believe that the outdated colonial-era views that still shape perceptions of Africa must change. These views perpetuate inequality and discrimination, including the racism faced by African-origin communities in Europe. My work with ONE seeks to shift the EU–Africa relationship away from aid dependency and towards a true partnership that values Africa's leadership and the role of youth in driving progress.

### Reframing the EU–Africa relationship: The role of the EU–Africa Youth Task Force

The EU–Africa Youth Task Force, convened ahead of the EU–Africa Summit, brought together 50 young leaders from Africa and Europe to ensure that youth perspectives were integrated into policy proposals. Our collaborative sessions addressed education, healthcare, digitalisation, and economic growth.

### Phase One: Collaborative Discussions and Policy Development

We explored key issues impacting youth in both regions and developed policy recommendations focused on education, digital infrastructure, and job creation. These themes shaped recommendations that emphasised youth empowerment and sustainable development.

### Phase Two: Advocacy and Direct Engagement with Leaders

After formalising our proposals, we shared our work with various African and European leaders. I had the opportunity to present our proposals to Jutta Urpilainen, the European Commissioner for International Partnerships, during her first official visit to Paris. We stressed the importance of youth inclusion in decision-making and the need for investment in education and digital access to ensure that African youth can lead in their own countries' development.

### Rebalancing the EU–Africa Partnership

One of the key takeaways from the task force was the need to redefine the EU–Africa partnership. For too long, it has been shaped



by unequal power dynamics, with Africa seen as dependent on external aid rather than as an equal partner capable of addressing global challenges.

As a young woman with deep ties to both continents, I strongly advocate for a new narrative that recognises Africa's leadership and potential. Outdated colonial-era views perpetuate inequalities and harmful stereotypes that affect people of African origin living in Europe and limit Africa's role on the global stage.

Our work calls for the following initiatives:

- **Building equitable partnerships:** The EU–Africa relationship must be based on mutual respect and shared benefits, recognising the contributions of African youth in tackling global challenges, such as climate change, digital transformation, and economic recovery.
- **Prioritising education:** Investment in education is critical to ensure that African youth have the skills necessary to thrive. Policies promoting sustainable employment will help build more resilient economies in both Africa and Europe.
- **Empowering youth to lead:** Youth must be empowered to lead in key areas, such as entrepreneurship, technology, and social innovation.

### A call to action for policymakers

The EU–Africa Youth Task Force has demonstrated that youth-led initiatives can profoundly shape policy. However, such efforts must be institutionalised. Policymakers need to ensure ongoing youth engagement to shape policies meaningfully at the national and international levels.

# POSTSCRIPT

## Carolina R. Earle

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Every young person is born with a power that should not be compromised. Yet—at least for a little while, especially in their youngest years—they are the population most exposed to the whims and the decisions of others. The fact that they are most implicated and bound to the world they have been brought into, and that they should be here long after all of us, demands that we urgently rectify their exclusion from the halls of power which shape this same world. In this pursuit, we must specifically centre youth who are marginalised and oppressed on the basis of intersecting characteristics—on the basis of race, disability, ethnicity, gender, heritage, socio-economic status, and the like.

In this collection, you will read the words of inspirational young leaders who have mustered the time and energy to write directly to us. They write with great power and in the belief that greater solidarity can be forged amongst different generations and diverse peoples. They

write from places of joy and from places of pain; sometimes defeated, sometimes hopeful, sometimes in sickness, sometimes in the midst of conflict, and sometimes truly against all odds. Indeed, in the face of structural exclusion, they retain faith—sometimes faltering—that you might listen, and act on their words.

As such, if this collection has found its way into your hands, as you turn each page please listen. Please remember the creative, exceptional person behind each piece. Imagine them sitting across from you.

Read their calls for action, and ask yourself what you can do to realise at least a little of their ask. Remember that for each leader represented here, there are multitudes of young people looking to them, to you, to us to act. Remember those who are no longer with us, broken mentally and physically by the worst of this world. Let us honour them. Remember that you

can still believe in a future as bright as the ones that the young leaders in these pages advocate for. Remember that they are here to hold hands with you. Remember that we can move forward with compassion and togetherness in the pursuit of a better world. Remember that, as you act and advocate against systems which feel totalising and entrenched and unshakeable, you are not alone. There are so many who believe in you and who also need you to believe that another world is possible. You can help make that world a reality.

Arundhati Roy, whose belief and sentiment echoes through these pages, said: “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” Breathe, and know that we are here with you as you hasten the arrival of new futures that make space for us all.

THEME 1  
ENGAGING

THEME 2  
TRANSFORMING

THEME 3  
REORDERING

THEME 4  
MOVEMENT-BUILDING

THEME 5  
NETWORK-BUILDING

THEME 6  
CONVENING

# CONTRIBUTORS

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**MIYA MANU ABRAHAM** is the youth community manager at Learning Planet Institute, where she is also pursuing her Masters in Learning Sciences. She is a youth community student social worker, digital activist and inclusion enthusiast, passionate about equity and all aspects of it for the planet, people and peace. Lastly, she volunteers as Movers Ambassador at the Movers programme facilitating workshops on SDGs and 21st-century skills for young people across India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

**SHREYAN ACHARYA** works on education and governance in India. He is academically trained in law and holds an MA in Development Studies from the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. He is working with Central Square Foundation to support the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) mission in the State of Haryana. He has experience working with the Government of Delhi supporting education reforms in government schools in Delhi.

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**SALIQA AMIN**, an alumna of CAP2030's Youth Advisory Board (2023-2024), shaped health policy and children's welfare. She contributed to the Child Health and Well-Being Dashboard by WHO, UNICEF, and CAP2030, and a policy report on harmful marketing to youth with NCD Alliance. At the Learning Planet

Festival, she shared ideas on combating intergenerational poverty.

**ANONYMOUS** is a young civil servant in a high-income country who wished to contribute but chose to withhold their name for fear of professional reprisals.

**ARASH AZIZI** is an Iranian writer and currently a research fellow at the Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future at Boston University and a board member at the Nonviolent Initiative for Democracy. His latest book, What Iranians Want: Women, Life, Freedom, was published in 2024.

**AIMÉ BADA** currently works as Project Coordinator at Enda Jeunesse Action, an organisation under Enda Tiers Monde and a support structure for the Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MAEJT). Before joining the coordination team in the late 1990s, he was the national delegate of the Association of Working Children in Benin.

**JENNIFER BAHRAMI** is a seasoned social impact leader and strategic adviser. As the founder of Good Impact Labs, Jennifer specializes in crafting initiatives that drive meaningful impact and foster innovation. Jennifer is the co-creator of the Festival of Hope on behalf of the International Baccalaureate. She previously co-founded the Center for Social Impact Communication at Georgetown University and held management roles across the public and private sector.

**NADINE BENEDIX** is a PhD candidate at the Chair of Transnational Governance at the Technical University of Darmstadt. Her research involves

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**YASMINA BENSLIMANE** is an award-winning feminist activist, consultant and women's empowerment coach. As founder of Politics4Her, she advocates for political participation and representation for young women and girls from global majority countries, focusing on climate justice, migration and gender-based violence.

**ESTER BORGES FRICKES** is an education activist and founder of the NGO "Peças do Amanhã," which creates educational board games for public school teachers in Brazil. Her organization impacts over 3,000 students and has been awarded in the "Innovation" category by Brazil's largest education organization.

**PAULA BORGES FRICKES** is a young leader from Rio de Janeiro passionate about public policy. She was one of the top five winners of the Moving Beyond GDP essay competition organized by UNCTAD, the Beyond Lab, and Rethinking Economics. Additionally, she has contributed to the development of bills focused on urban inclusion for underprivileged students through the Participa RJ initiative.

**JAMES SURU BOYON** is a Nigerian national currently serving as Programme Manager and Child Protection Specialist at Enda Jeunesse Action, an organisation under Enda Tiers Monde and a support structure for the Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs (MAEJT). Prior to joining the coordination team, he served as National Delegate of the Working Children's Association in Nigeria.

**JONAS BRUNS** is a German Model UN (MUN) enthusiast and strategy consultant at PwC Strategy&, based in Austria. With a background in mechanical engineering from Karlsruhe, Shanghai, and Paris, he has participated in MUNs globally since high school. Jonas runs mymun, the world's largest MUN platform, enhancing accessibility and efficiency for delegates and organizers worldwide.

**MATTEO DE SIMONE** is a co-founder of the Fair Internship Initiative (FII), and since 2015, he has coordinated its advocacy for fair internships in the UN system, first in Geneva and then globally. Trained as a political scientist, he has 10 years of experience in international affairs in the UN system and the EU. He has worked professionally and on a volunteer basis for more than 12 years as civil society advocates for both local and international organizations, such as Transparency International and Youth Action for Peace.

**ALEXANDER DIETZ** is an advocate for youth engagement through Model UN (MUN), born in Germany and based in Europe. He co-manages mymun and co-founded MUN Command to equip every student with the tools to participate in at least one MUN conference. Besides his passion for MUN, he recently graduated in Engineering & Policy Analysis from Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands.

**CAROLINA EARLE** was awarded a B.A. in History and English from the University of Oxford, and a Masters in International Affairs from the Geneva Graduate Institute. Previously working on gender equality through the EQUALS-EU project, Carolina now works for the Global Community

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**ANTONELLA BELÉN GERVAGI** is a young feminist economist from Buenos Aires, Argentina. She joined both the IAFFE and the Young Scholar Committee in 2022. In 2023, she participated in the first Feminist Economics School in Cape Town, and in 2024, she participated in the committee to organize the 2024 School. She really wants this to continue for many more years so that it reaches many more enthusiasts of feminist economics.

**NATASHA HARRIS-HARB** (she/her) is a Lebanese Canadian feminist activist. She leads Youth Movements and Feminist Leadership at the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). Natasha is the lead of the nonprofit Chalk Back. Natasha holds a Master's in Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership from Carleton University.

**LAURENCE JONES-WILLIAMS** is the Executive Director at Rethinking Economics International.

He has spent the last 6 years directing Rethinking Economics, an international youth charity working to transform economics education for people and planet. He has contributed to national and international education policy and developed strategies to transform the economics curriculums at over 10 universities and trained over 300 young leaders.

**CARRIE KARSGAARD** is an assistant professor in the Education Department at Cape Breton University, teaching in sustainability, creativity, and innovation. She is also a co-editor of the Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education. A thread throughout her research and practice involves the links between social, ecological, and epistemic justice.

**EVA KEIFFENHEIM** is an Associate Consultant at Big Change, advising on strategic initiatives. She supports the Big Education Conversation and coauthored "A New Education Story." Eva focuses on education system transformation, raising awareness, community engagement, and developing evidence for change. She has published over 250 articles on education, which have been read by more than three million people worldwide.

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**TIM LOGAN** is an education leader and a co-creator of Festival of Hope on behalf of the International Baccalaureate, working to create spaces for millions of young people to speak

up and turn complex challenges into positive action and hope. Bringing his extensive I earnings and insights from a global career in international teaching and school leadership, Tim is also host/producer of the education podcast Future Learning Design.

**JULIANA MAKONISE** is a purpose-driven leader from Zimbabwe who is committed to developing innovative and sustainable solutions to global challenges. She has received national and global recognition for her advocacy work in education equity, youth empowerment, and economic development. She is a solo host of the "On the Spot with Juliana" podcast, a platform for digital storytelling for social change. Juliana is currently a final year Quantitative Economics and Government student at Smith College, USA.

**NOELIA MÉNDEZ SANTOLORIA** is a young feminist economist from Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she is doing her MA studies, and she has been part of the IAFFE Young Scholar Committee since 2021. There, she found a place of belonging where she could share personal and professional experience with fellow feminists from other parts of the world. Since then, she has been involved into different YS initiatives in the IAFFE, such as the IAFFE School and online events.

#### MOUVEMENT AFRICAÏN DES ENFANTS ET

**JEUNES TRAVAILLEURS (MAEJT)** is a child-led organisation aimed at protecting working children and youth established in 1994 in Côte d'Ivoire. Members are organised first into "grass-roots" groups based on location or vocation, and they work together to address issues

that affect them and the children and youth around them. Groups are further organised into regional and national associations.

**YASMINE ALI MOURAD** was born in Cairo and raised across Croatia, Germany, and Venezuela, is a Media Design graduate and passionate MUNer (Model UN). Through MUN, she became active in various forms of youth engagement and involvement in the work of the UN. Moreover, she manages all social media content and communications for mymun, allowing it to reach a wider global audience.

**CONSTANCE MUNCH** After graduating from the University of Geneva with a master's degree in political science, Constance has been working for the past two years with the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), which is dedicated to the prevention of violent extremism. She wrote her MA thesis on European counterterrorism policies in the face of democratic requirements, and as a Junior Associate, Constance is involved in grant management work with local civil society organisations in the five Sahelian countries.

**FHATUWANI MUSWOBI** is a student at the University of the Western Cape who is currently pursuing her masters in Comparative Constitutional Law. She is a scholar with an interest in decolonial studies and is passionate about Black consciousness. She dreams of making an impact on as many people's lives as she can in her lifetime.

**YULIA NESTEROVA** is a lecturer at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. She researches peacebuilding education and youth-inclusive peacebuilding. Yulia is a member of the

International Working Group on Youth, Peace, and Security at FBA, the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development.

**SYLVAIN OBEDI** is a passionate peacebuilder, disability rights advocate, and climate justice activist from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He founded "Enable the Disable Action" and serves as Executive Director. Selected as a Kofi Annan 2024 Changemaker, he works with the International Disability Alliance and various youth networks. He holds degrees in International Public Law and an MBA, focusing on human rights and inclusivity.

**RINU ODUALA** is a global youth fellow for democracy and advocacy in global health. Notably, she served on the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry and Restitution on police brutality and was a Hurford Youth Fellow 2023 at the National Endowment for Democracy. As a young leader who gained global recognition in the EndSARS movement, she has been nominated for Future Awards Africa for Advocacy and Activism and currently oversees programs at Connect Hub NG.

**ASLI OZCELIK** is a lecturer at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. She researches armed conflicts and peacemaking, primarily from an international law perspective. She is a member of the International Steering Group for Youth-Inclusive Peace Processes, which is led by the United Nations Youth Office (UNYO), the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and Search for Common Ground.

**PEACE MONICA PIMER** is the Founder and Executive Director of Nile Girls Forum, Uganda,

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**ILIANA PUJOLS** has played a role in transforming youth justice across the globe for the past 7 years. Over her career, she's brought expertise around youth-adult partnerships and system-impacted youth leadership in order to achieve prison abolition. She previously served as a Young Justice Leader for Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies, and a 2021 World Congress Youth Council Member for Terres de Hommes. Her current work is centered on supporting state campaigns and young leaders working to close youth prisons as the Director of Youth Organizing and Leadership for the Youth First Justice Collaborative.

**IOANNYS PADILLA** is a regional colaboradora for MOLACNNATs who directly accompanies the current child delegates of the movement. She joined the Peruvian working children's movement at the age of eight and subsequently held the position of National Delegate.

**ANU PELTOLA** is Director of UNCTAD Statistics, oversees global trade and development data releases and leads the development of new statistics on trade, gender, and inclusive growth. She co-led the UN's 'Beyond GDP' initiative and

the effort to cost sustainable development. Previously, she worked at UNECE and began her career at Statistics Finland.

**NOHORA ALEJANDRA QUIGUANTAR** is a young indigenous Colombian woman with a degree in Biology and part of the UN Women Feminist Action Coalition for Climate Justice. She accompanies different community processes with women focused on biodiversity conservation. Alejandra is also Youth Champion of the International Gender Champion and founder of Tejiendo Pensamiento (Indigenous Women for Climate) that promotes the defence of territory and human rights of indigenous women and girls.

**AJMAL RAYMAR** is the Executive Director of Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT), a youth-led nonprofit in Afghanistan, and a member of the SDG4 Youth Network. Under his leadership, APT has addressed human rights crises and promoted girls' education. Ajmal led the Afghan Youth Representative program to the United Nations, and also managed a school for internally displaced children in Afghanistan. After the Taliban's takeover in 2021, Ajmal relocated to Canada, where he uses his expertise to raise awareness about educational and human rights challenges faced by Afghan women.

**FERNANDA RIVERA** is the Youth Engagement Coordinator at the Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN) in Mexico City. She holds a degree in Commerce and International Business from Escuela Bancaria y Comercial and is a passionate advocate of youth participation and social justice.



**PEGGY NAMADI SAKA** is a professional with over 17 years of experience in Development Leadership and Human Rights, with a strong focus on advocacy for Child Rights programming, Child Protection, and Women's Rights throughout Kenya. She has a Master's Degree in Project Planning and Management and currently holds the post of Regional Coordinator-Coast for KAACR.

**TRINE SCHMIDT** is a former advisor to the Beyond Lab (formerly the SDG Lab) and IISD. Trine has worked to promote a systems thinking approach to the SDGs through various roles at the Nordic Council of Ministers, the UN and the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

**JORINA SENDEL** is a justice-centered learning advocate with a master's degree in changing education from the University of Helsinki and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Kiel. She has served on the board of Lern-Fair e.V. and worked at the Education Innovation Lab in Berlin, promoting innovative learning environments and intergenerational collaboration.

**MINHAIR SHAHID** is passionate about leveraging ICTs for Development (ICTs4D) to advance sustainable development goals, with a focus on gender equality, health, and justice through digital inclusion. Her interdisciplinary research, rooted in forensic psychology and policy-making, aims to drive inclusive technological advancements. Minahir is currently advancing her expertise at the Graduate School of Science and Technology Policy (STP) at Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST).

**LYNETTE SHULTZ** is a professor at the University of Alberta, Faculty of Education, where she researches and teaches educational policy studies, global citizenship and climate change, and leadership for justice.

**ED STEVENETTE** coordinates youth projects in the alliance, notably leading the annual Learning Planet Youth Design Challenge inviting youth globally to pitch learning programmes for their dream university. Ed is at the heart passionate about facilitating learning experiences that help people to take care of themselves, others and the planet.

**LILIA TOUIL** is a 24-year-old French law student with Master's degrees in International, European, and Digital Law. She has advocated for youth inclusion in decision-making processes at UNESCO and French ministries. Currently, she is completing an apprenticeship in digital law with Amadeus. Lilia's work focuses on law, technology, and global mobility, with a commitment to advancing education, youth empowerment, and social justice.

**JOSIAH TUALAMALI'I** (Salelesi, Satuiatua, Fagaloa, Lepa, A'ufaga—Samoa) is a postgraduate student studying History at the University of Canterbury. Outside of study he works in wellbeing governance, and supports child, adolescent and young people's voice in decision making through various roles. Josiah continues to be a trustee for the Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation Trust (PYLAT) in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

**ZIYAAN VIRJI** is an award-winning social impact entrepreneur. He is the youth engagement lead for the Festival of Hope at the International Baccalaureate. At only 15, he founded For The

Menstruator, a global organization working towards menstrual equity that has empowered over 25,000 people in 10 countries.

**RIKI WELSH** (Samoa and Niue) has served in various roles to strengthen Pacific youth, student, and community voice and wellbeing. He was the first Chairperson of the post simulation Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation Trust (PYLAT) Council in Aotearoa, New Zealand. He is the current Secretary and Treasurer of PYLAT.

#### **WORKING GROUP ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT OF THE GLOBAL RESEARCH AND ACTION NETWORK FOR A NEW ECO-SOCIAL CONTRACT (GRAN-ESC): GRAN-ESC**

emphasizes youth empowerment as a central focus within its broader initiatives. It supports youth-led research, activism, and policy advocacy, ensuring young people are equipped to address ecological and social challenges.

**HEELA YOON** is a first-generation refugee and a passionate advocate for climate action and mental health. With over five years of experience in communications and marketing for leading INGOs, she has led impactful initiatives across countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, amplifying brand visibility and driving meaningful global engagement. As the Founder and Executive Director of the Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace Organization, Heela has supported over 7,500 families and promoted gender equality. She also serves as an External Board Member for the FCDO, advising the UK government on empowering women and girls globally. Recognized as a United Nations Young

Leader for the SDGs, Heela continues to foster peace and global cooperation.

**OLENA ZHURAVSKA** is a cadet of the Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs and a future defender of Ukraine, who plans to treat the mental wounds of soldiers as a police psychologist. In the pages of her articles and essays, she wages battle for her country and more meaningful youth engagement in local and United Nations processes with power and depth of thought. Olena is also a candidate for a master of sports in rhythmic gymnastics, which inspires her to write further.

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