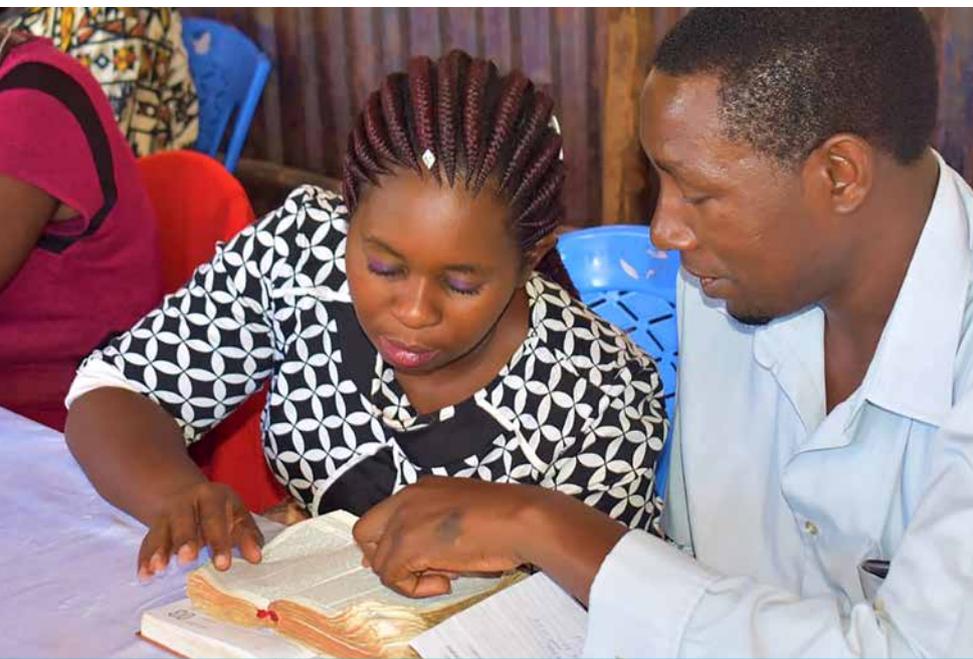


Champions and change-makers:

**Case studies of young leaders addressing inequality
and promoting accountability in their communities**



Young Nigerians at the National Day of Action demanding the passage of the #NTYTR Bill.
PHOTO: IBRAHIM FAROUK



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COVER PHOTOS:

Top left: Participants in a Nairobi event of the Kenya Alliance between LGBTQ activists and religious leaders. Credit: nature network/ActionAid

top right: Young People Visiting AAB stall, Bangladesh. Credit: Md. Golam Morshed/ActionAid

Bottom: Members of the Abda and Immriesh youth group helping with construction of the new school. Credit: ActionAid

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List of Abbreviations

7NDP	Seventh National Development Plan (Zambia)
AAAZ	Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia
APFSD	Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IEC	Information, Education, Communication
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
MAHIPSO	Makasa KP HIV Prevention and Support Organisation
SCEEP	Strengthening Citizens' Engagement in Electoral Processes program
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TYVA	Tanzania Youth Vision Association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
YIAGA	Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

Glossary

Activista	ActionAid's global youth campaigning network. It comprises ActionAid country members, and local and national organisations of young people and partners. Activista focuses on young people's campaigning through mobilisation and engagement of young people at local, national and international levels. This is just one way that ActionAid works with young people – some countries engage with grassroots youth groups and the organisation also works with youth social movements.
Global Platforms	<p>A Global Platform can either be a physical space for capacity-building where young people live and learn together, a youth hub for young people to convene and strategise, or an online community focusing on peer-to-peer learning. These Global Platforms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide innovative, creative and quality-based capacity-building for young people to lead social, political and economic change.• Support dynamic and democratic youth hub spaces where global and local young people can network, share visions, act and develop together.• Connect local and global struggles.
Reflection-Action	<p>Reflection-Action is a harmonised participatory methodology based on the practice of Paulo Freire. It uses a range of participatory tools to help create an open, democratic environment in which everyone is able to contribute. Participants work together to analyse their situation, identify rights violations and bring about change. Where appropriate, Reflection-Action can also be used to support literacy, numeracy and language learning. For more information see: <i>ActionAid Networked Toolbox</i>, http://www.networkedtoolbox.com/pages/about-reflection-action/</p>



Introduction

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015,¹ the world faced an enormous dual challenge and opportunity – to sustainably end poverty and reduce gender, economic, political and social inequality by 2030.

The 2030 Agenda established a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), incorporating 169 targets, which aim to address poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, and strengthen peace and justice by 2030. The SDGs have been adopted by almost every country in the world, with states bearing the primary responsibility for their implementation. The vision and preamble of the 2030 Agenda recognise the “*supremely ambitious and transformational*” nature of this commitment and note: “*We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.*”²

Given the scale of their ambition, the SDGs cannot be achieved without change to the economic and governance systems that drive poverty, and without the inclusion of those who have previously been left behind, including young people. However, after more than three years, despite 140 governments announcing and/or presenting Voluntary National Reviews, the transformative promise of Agenda 2030 is being diluted.³ The current economic paradigm, which reduces states’ resources and capacity to respect, protect and fulfil rights, redistribute wealth and power and ensure people are resilient from shocks, undermines Agenda 2030.

To deliver the goals and targets effectively and democratically, there is a need for pro-poor systemic economic and social mechanisms, such as universal publicly financed, publicly owned and delivered social protection and public services, access to decent (non-precarious) work, redistributing women's unpaid care and domestic work, and action and finance for climate justice. To achieve this systemic change, it is critical that new ideas and political alternatives can be developed and listened to, which cannot happen unless diverse voices – including those of young people, particularly young women or marginalised young people – are part of the conversation.

► The challenge facing youth movements

With more than 40% of the world's population under 25 years of age,⁴ and 89% of people aged 10-24 living in the Global South,⁵ young people⁶ play a pivotal role in transforming and shaping a more just, equitable and sustainable society. Despite this, young people are often denied positions of power and responsibility. Young people under 30 make up just over 2% of the world's parliamentarians (less than 1.5% in Africa and Asia), and less than half of that number are women.⁷

Young people are also living in a world of rising inequality. Since 1980, while the poorest half of the population have seen rising incomes and deteriorating living standards, the top 1% richest individuals in the world have captured twice as much growth as the bottom 50%.⁸ Growing up in an increasingly unequal world, young people face high rates of unemployment: 60% of young people aged 15-24 are jobless.⁹

Many young people, particularly those in rural areas, lack access to safe, affordable, quality and gender-responsive public services such as education, healthcare and vocational training. As well as being a violation of their rights, lack of employment and access to public services hampers young people's full participation in society. Young people are not a homogenous group, and many experience compounding and intersecting inequalities as a result of their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status.

We are also seeing shrinking civil society spaces in many countries, with state protections of freedom of speech and association being eroded, stricter regulations on civil society organisations, and crackdowns on public debate and protest.¹⁰ In many cases it is youth movements leading the fight for civic space, with young people creatively working within and outside the system to push for just and equitable policies and greater participation of young people in governance.

► Young people's innovative practices in creating change

Young people's exclusion from the democratic governance processes that drive implementation of the SDGs is a threat to their achievement. Young people were actively involved in the development of the SDGs (formally, through the UN Major Group of Children and Youth, and informally, through grassroots coalitions such as action/2015), and are key actors in ensuring that policies to implement the SDGs remain true to this vision.¹¹ The inclusion of progressive young people and their movements in democratic governance is an important part of the transformation that is needed if the SDGs are to be achieved. As well as championing accountability, young people and youth movements are part of shaping the alternative solutions that are needed to move past "business as usual", for example by pushing for more inclusive policies and laws, fighting for better working conditions and public services, and mobilising citizens around climate change.

This compilation of case studies highlights the work of young people and civil society working with or supported by ActionAid. Using the tools at their disposal – from social media to community consultations to political party manifestos – the young change-makers profiled here are expanding the space for youth participation in

governance, and fighting for inclusion of those who are marginalised due to their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status. Many of these case studies are on a small scale, and changes made may seem far from the broader transformative economic and social changes needed to implement the SDGs. However, they serve to highlight why it is necessary to include the voices of young people and youth-led civil society in the larger project of SDG implementation, and they show the critical role young people can play in holding governments to account for the SDG commitments.

Who is this document for?

This document compiles case studies from 12 ActionAid and partner programmes – Bangladesh, Ghana, Jordan, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe – all working on governance processes related to the SDGs, particularly Goals 4 (education), 5 (gender), 8 (economic growth and decent work), 10 (inequality), 16 (peace, justice and democratic institutions) and 17 (partnership for the goals). The case studies in this publication highlight a range of strategies that young people are using to ensure their equal rights are fulfilled and they have a stronger voice in the decisions that affect them.

Reflections with the young activists involved – documented in annual reports and through interviews, highlight a number of learnings for those hoping to support young people. This report makes available the lessons emerging across countries. We hope that ActionAid staff, partners and other civil society groups can use this knowledge to lobby other organisations, donors and international organisations looking to support youth-led initiatives in ways that are empowering and impactful. We also hope the knowledge and examples can be used to influence those government officials looking to engage young people in governance processes.

The case studies are clustered thematically, followed by reflections emerging from practice. These are not definitive, but are intended to spark further thinking and discussion among young people, their allies and accountable duty bearers.

What can we **learn** from the case studies?

The following lessons were developed through an iterative process, based on a review of programme reports and reflection discussions with programme managers and young people.



Lessons learned on supporting young people fighting for representative democracies:

- **Promote agile movements:** informal social movements can allow for agile campaigning and break down some of the barriers that discourage or hinder young people from getting involved in formalised institutions. Civil society can support these social movements in a range of ways, including through resources, meeting spaces, funding and training. Such support can be effective where it does not force the movement to formalise, or take the space of the movement, but provides resources and solidarity to build on the movement's strengths.
- **Engage politically:** to improve political representation of people living in poverty, it is necessary for young people to work politically – with, but outside, party politics. The case studies show how this can involve young people presenting their demands to political parties, bringing the political party process to communities, and supporting communities to understand political and electoral processes. Political work can complement other advocacy actions, including targeting government directly, through media, through public mobilisation and through engagement in international spaces.
- **Give young people a seat at the table:** around the world young people, particularly those marginalised because of their intersecting identities including age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status are dramatically underrepresented in politics, and this underrepresentation threatens achievement of the SDGs. It is critical for governments and political parties to see young people as more than 'foot soldiers' or 'troublemakers' to be co-opted or controlled. Instead, young people should be given a seat at the decision-making table and an opportunity to shape the future they will inherit. Civil society organisations play an important role in standing with and supporting youth movements that are calling for a seat at the table.
- **Use an intersectional feminist analysis:** new initiatives for young people's participation must be analysed from a perspective of whether they are available and accessible to the most marginalised young people, whose access to opportunities is based on their intersecting identities, as noted above. In addition, analysis should cover whether the power structures that perpetrate their marginalisation are being challenged.



Lessons learned on supporting youth-led accountability initiatives:

- **Support young people to engage in local governance:** although the SDGs are an international framework, many national governments are linking SDGs to national development plans and priorities, which in turn are implemented by local agencies or governments. Governments should use participatory approaches (planning and budgeting, open budget discussions, etc.) to engage with civil society, with young people as core,

and ensure their voices are heard in the implementation process. For young people and the organisations that support them, SDG commitments can be used as a tool to hold local-level duty bearers to account for provision of public services at local level, and the inclusion of marginalised citizens in governance.

- **Support youth-led processes:** enabling young people to develop the skills and tools to lead their own research and accountability projects strengthens their understanding of the issues in their context and inspires them to develop initiatives that are fully youth-owned and reflect the concerns most important to young people's lives. This in turn allows young people to develop the evidence base they need to take action and fuel effective lobbying and advocacy for their rights and entitlements.
- **Use multiple approaches:** achieving lasting and systemic change requires persistence, and fighting a battle on multiple fronts. In the case studies in this report, young people and civil society organisations used a wide range of research and accountability tools to gather evidence, and targeted duty bearers through multiple methods at once, using invited spaces as well as claiming their own spaces for action.



Lessons learned on supporting youth leadership on social inclusion:

- **Create and protect safe spaces:** safe, youth-led spaces (such as community centres, youth-led programmes and youth networks) are important mechanisms through which young people can convene and build their own networks, projects and policy proposals. Supporting young people's empowerment means more than facilitating opportunities for young people to speak within existing spaces: it also means giving control of spaces to young people themselves.
- **Act-reflect-learn-act:** supporting youth groups, networks and movements is a long-term process. The processes of building a democratic and safe space for reflection, understanding the context and planning for action all contribute to building trust and confidence among group members, and developing thoughtful and impactful actions. This iterative process takes time, but can be helpful in moving from local problems to eventually addressing the structural causes of poverty and injustice.
- **Build unlikely solidarity alliances:** for youth networks and civil society, building unlikely alliances outside of activist silos, or with different activist networks, can require time, patience and sensitivity – but the benefits of this convening and dialogue can have lasting effects well beyond the project itself. Collaboration is critical. When civil society groups work collaboratively with each other and with a broad range of allies, it can have a transformative impact at local and national levels.
- **Ensure safeguarding:** when working with marginalised human rights defenders, and particularly in contexts where activists may face prosecution or reprisals, it is critical to employ tight security measures, thorough risk analysis, risk mitigation measures and development of rapid response mechanisms. This is particularly relevant for work around SDG 16 (peace, justice and democratic institutions), where such work challenges existing power structures, but also for work across all goals that involve supporting the advocacy of marginalised groups (such as LGBTQ activists).

Emerging issues for discussion and questions:

- **How to build in an intersectional feminist analysis?** As civil society organisations explore new interventions and understand the impacts of youth interventions, it is important to use an intersectional feminist approach and be mindful of *differential impacts* of interventions on young people related to their intersecting identities. Interventions will fail unless they ensure that the most marginalised young people can actively participate, and in order to do that they acknowledge the impact of power and go some way to breaking down the power structures that prevent participation.
- **How to balance competing interests when resources are limited?** Where civil society organisations and youth movements have complementary goals, opportunities for partnership and collaboration can bring mutual benefits. However, youth movements and organisations have limited resources to engage in social change initiatives. How can civil society organisations engage young people in their work without depleting young people's resources for their own work? How can civil society organisations best support young people's priorities where these diverge from the organisation's priorities?
- **How to build positive partnerships?** Young people's movements will be challenged to fundraise – and will have to make decisions around the type of funds they accept. For example, how can young people's movements maintain their own identity rather than be subsumed by business interests or the aims of others outside their movements? In practical terms, how can civil society organisations support youth movements with resources without requiring such movements to formalise?
- **How to operate politically whilst being non-partisan?** Non-partisanship is a key component of many civil society organisations' core values, and is key to their ability to work constructively with governments. At the same time, young politicians and parliamentarians play a vital role in opening up spaces for youth participation in democracy. How can civil society groups continue to support young leaders in political spaces while retaining independence from party politics?

Young partners advocating for gender and youth respective public services.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID



▶ Introduction endnotes

1. United Nations (2015) *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
2. *Ibid*
3. See commentary by K Donald and M Ramoroka, *Five key takeaways from the 2018 High Level Political Forum*, Centre for Economic and Social Rights, <http://www.cesr.org/five-key-takeaways-2018-high-level-political-forum>
4. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017) *World population prospects: 2017 revision, key findings and advance tables*, Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP/248, Table S1, available at: https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017_KeyFindings.pdf
5. UNFPA (2014) *The power of 1.8 billion: adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future – state of world population*, New York: UNFPA, available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf
6. ActionAid definition of 'young person' focuses on the socio-political identity of young people who are seeking the rights and independence that adulthood can bring. The age range defined as 'youth' varies between countries and between contexts within those countries. We use the age range 15-30 as a guide only. Throughout this report we use the term 'young person' or 'young people'; although this can face critique for being appearing to be gender blind, we to refer to all those in this group with their multiple different identities (race, ethnicity, disability, religion, economic, class, geography, religion, sexual identity).
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8. F Alvaredo, L Chancel, T Picketty, E Saez, and G. Zucma (2018) *World Inequality Report*. World Inequality Lab, available at: <https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-summary-english.pdf> at pp. 5-6.
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10. See Civicus (2018) *State of Civil Society Report 2017*, Civicus, available at: https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2018/socs-2018-overview_top-ten-trends.pdf
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Young people fighting for representative democracies



SDG 16, target 16.7 commits states to, “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”. It intersects with SDG 10, target 10.2, which commits states to “empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status,” (emphasis added). These targets recognise the foundational importance of accountable and representative governance for sustainable development.

The four case studies below show examples of young people fighting to make governance more representative of young people. The first two cases, from Zambia and Nigeria, profile movements that aim to increase the participation of young people in the electoral process – as parliamentarians and as voters – by removing legal and structural barriers. The case from Zimbabwe highlights the role of young people in improving the legitimacy and accountability of elections, with young people acting as election monitors and voter educators. The case study from Nepal highlights a programme that aimed to take advantage of constitutional changes to ensure that citizens – particularly women who are marginalised due to caste, age, education level or economic status – could access new opportunities to participate in local governance.





Zambia: a youth-led social movement pushing for political equality

In Zambia only three of the 165 members of parliament are under 35, despite 79% of the total population being under that age.¹² But an emerging youth movement, Youth4Parliament, is tackling this political inequality and lack of space for young people head on – and making change happen.

Youth4Parliament started when a group of young Zambians from diverse backgrounds attended training under the Programme for Young Politicians in Africa in early 2018. After the sessions, three participants started talking about what they could do to improve young people’s representation in parliament. *“The first night we had discussed it between the three of us, then said ‘let’s share the idea with the entire group’,”* co-founder Nawa Villy Sitali explained. Their initial idea – that young people could come together as a social movement to push for better participation of young people in politics and government – took off immediately. Since then it has grown into a diverse and powerful force for change.

As a social movement, Youth4Parliament has no formal organisational status, and young people can get involved in the campaign without needing to be members. Although funding is an ongoing challenge, the movement is continuing to build its profile and currently has a reach of 5,000 young people on its combined social media platforms. As Nawa explains, *“We didn’t want it to end with a conversation, but wanted something to have meaningful impact.”* Youth4Parliament’s aim is to increase young people’s representation in parliament. Nawa points out, *“If we were to move it to proportional representation we would say young people are represented by the minority and the majority represents the minority. Our primary goal is to have 50% of members of parliament under the age of 35.”* Movement members also want to see more meaningful engagement of young people in politics. Currently, young people are seen as foot soldiers rather than decision-makers within political parties. *“Young people are given roles to chant slogans and sing songs for other older politicians. We want to move to a role where young people have meaningful roles in politics,”* says Nawa.

► Securing political commitments

Youth4Parliament has already had success securing commitments from political parties. On 31 August 2018, Youth4Parliament facilitated the signing of a social contract¹³ between the Secretaries-General of the seven major political parties in Zambia and the young members of those parties. In the contract the Secretaries-General agreed to ensure that their parties will prioritise young people as candidates in at least five constituencies in each of Zambia’s 10 provinces at the 2021 general election, and to recognise gender balance by ensuring at least 50% of the awarded seats go to young women.

► Inspiring participation

Youth4Parliament’s first campaign initiative – Get Out and Participate – focuses on motivating young people’s political engagement. Zambia’s 2016 elections were met with apathy from young voters, and many young people are afraid that being too closely associated with politics will dent their career opportunities in future. A key challenge faced by Youth4Parliament has been mobilising young people to get on board with the idea of participating in politics – especially young women. The Get Out and Participate campaign encourages young people to become

more politically aware, take an interest in governance and become active citizens. The next two years will see the campaign shift to more practical concerns of voter registration and voting itself as the 2021 election draws closer.

“I think Africa being a continent with a very young population – it is believed that, by the year 2030, 70% of the population will be under 35 – most of the decisions that are made affect young people because they are the ones who are going to face the implications of those decisions,” Nawa explains. “Young people need to get into parliament and have their voices heard so that the decisions that are made speak to the majority of the population – young people.”

Follow Youth4Parliament:

 <https://youth4parliament.com/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/Youth4Parliament/>

Facebook page for Youth4Parliament.
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Nigeria: Not Too Young to Run

Nigeria's Not Too Young to Run campaign aimed to reduce the constitutional age limit for running for office in Nigeria.¹⁴ Started in May 2016 by a network of civil society organisations, with the leadership of the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA)¹⁵, the campaign grew into a national movement that successfully mobilised thousands of young people and resulted in the passage of a Bill amending the age limits in accordance with the campaign's demands.

ActionAid was one of the movement's supporters, integrating support for the movement into a four-year programme known as Strengthening Citizens' Engagement in Electoral Processes (SCEEP). This programme, which was implemented across 180 communities in 10 states, worked with students, young people and Activista networks to strengthen their engagement in political processes. In 2016, SCEEP partners in six states held rallies, debates and town hall meetings as part of mobilisation efforts for the Not Too Young to Run bill, and supported young people to engage legislators in their constituencies to lobby for passage of the bill. This local engagement was critical, as the bill required both the national and state legislature to approve it.

A key moment for the campaign was the National Day of Action in July 2018, where young Nigerians marched on the national assembly to demand that their elected representatives pass the bill. Within two days of the action, the bill passed both houses. Following this, the movement hosted a town hall meeting in December 2018 with speakers and members of the state Houses of Assembly, which extracted further commitments from the states represented to pass the bill. As a result, the bill was passed in 33 of the 36 states of the federation, surpassing the two-thirds vote required by the state Houses of Assembly.

The Not Too Young to Run movement has gone on to inspire similar actions in other African countries, and a global Not Too Young to Run campaign¹⁶ sponsored by the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.¹⁷ The campaign and the legal changes it caused have already seen greater youth political participation in Nigeria: young candidates for the House of Representatives increased from 18% in the 2015 election to 27.4% in the 2019 elections.¹⁸ YIAGA and other movement leaders, including Activista groups and local SCEEP partners, are continuing the fight for greater youth representation in parliament in Nigeria.

Tony Nwoye – The Sponsor of the Bill in the House of Representatives delivering his remarks at the National Town Hall Meeting with Speakers of State Houses of Assembly; Behind are a cross section of speakers from some of the State Houses of Assembly.
PHOTO: IBRAHIM FAROUK





Zimbabwe: mobilising young people around a historic election

Zimbabwe's 2018 general election was a historic occasion – the first election since independence in which former president Robert Mugabe was not a candidate, and the first democratic elections following the 2017 military incursion into civilian politics. This transition provided a critical opportunity for Zimbabwe to enhance its human rights and democratic governance. To take advantage of this significant moment, ActionAid and partner Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) embarked on several initiatives to contribute to the participation of young people in the elections.

► Educating voters

ZimRights is a national organisation that works at grassroots level to promote, protect and defend human rights in Zimbabwe through education, information, networking, legal aid, counselling and advocacy. As a starting point for this project, ZimRights supported voter education training and shared civic education information. Working with ZimRights, Activista members went door-to-door, reaching 3,300 voters, and organised local roadshows, reaching 3,650 eligible voters. At the roadshows, well-known local musicians drew a crowd with music, and both young and older voters stayed to hear about the electoral process and their voting rights. Emmanuel Manyati, 34, Activista Provincial Coordinator for Mashonaland East (an agricultural and mining area in Zimbabwe's north) commented that, *“young people have access to information through the social media highway, but the older generation have less information on their voting rights.”* Emmanuel noted that, in Mashonaland East, some sections of the community – particularly older people – were reluctant to participate in the roadshows or to cast their vote, out of fear or from lack of confidence in the results. *“We kept on encouraging them that voting is the only democratic way of choosing our leaders. We told them that not participating in the electoral process is the same as voting for the wrong person.”*

ZimRights also supported targeted engagement between young people and commissions, parliament and government officials to demonstrate young people's important contribution to governance and to combat 'personality politics'. Before the elections, ZimRights, with civil society representatives, presented their community manifestos to political aspirants. These manifestos included a set of community aspirations and demands for political parties, election candidates, public officials and constitutional commissions. Demands included change of leadership, zero tolerance for corruption, accelerated economic growth, price stability, improved citizen access to their earnings, job creation, public sector reforms and delivery of quality services. A total of 200 people were reached through meetings and dialogues during community rallies and manifesto presentations, while 22,400 people were also reached through social media platforms. Some of the demands from the community manifestos were adopted by political parties, including that socio-economic interventions will include strict adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law, while sustaining unity, peace and tolerance for diversity.

► Supporting transparency through election observers

ZimRights also trained 180 young people and representatives of Zimbabwean civil society organisations as election observers. Election observers play an important role in monitoring local electoral activities, deterring corruption at polling places and making observations that can improve the regulation of future elections. In Zimbabwe, observers received two days of training and an election observation toolkit, as well as t-shirts to identify themselves. Observers monitored whether polling places were open for their assigned hours, whether

processes were standardised, whether election materials were available, and whether intimidation took place. Observers noted and reported a range of concerns – including some polling places that did not publish results when they were supposed to, incidents of ‘soft intimidation’ where political party candidates lingered at polling places to watch citizens cast their vote, and party candidates handing out food allowances to citizens close to the election, in breach of electoral regulations. These reports were collated and shared with the civil society command centre assessing the electoral process and its adherence to the electoral guidelines developed for the election. The reports also functioned as a tool to address any anomalies or complaints raised by citizens at their polling station.

► After the election

While Zimbabwe’s 2018 election was generally peaceful, observers noted it was not a perfect process, and significant civil unrest and violence erupted in the weeks following the election and the announcement of the ruling ZANU-PF party’s win. ZimRights with its alliance members is continuing to build on the work during the election to focus on holding elected members accountable. ActionAid, with support from the Training Centre for Development Cooperation in Arusha, Tanzania, has also engaged with Secretaries-General of Zimbabwe’s main political parties, and chairpersons of relevant portfolio committees (including education, health, local government and agriculture). It was agreed during the engagement process that an Electoral Promise Tracker, which tracks political party manifestos and promises made during elections, be introduced as a tool for monitoring progress of these indicators. The political representatives present adopted the suggestion, and the next stage involves the process of tabling a motion in parliament to develop a monitoring framework and an Electoral Promise Tracker.

Activista members in Mashonaland East.
PHOTO: EMMANUEL MANYATI/
ACTIONAID





Nepal: young people, women and marginalised citizens building pro-poor, representative democratic institutions

Nepal adopted a new constitution in 2015, initiating a significant progressive transformation of the country's governance processes. As a result in 2017, after a pause of 20 years, local government positions were elected in a multi-party democratic process. Nepal's 2015 constitution mandates that one-third of national-level House of Representative seats are reserved for women.¹⁹ At ward committee level, local legislation mandates that at least two of the five committee seats must be held by women, and one must be a woman of the *Dalit*²⁰ caste. In rural municipalities there must be one female position holder between mayor and deputy mayor (and chair and deputy chair).²¹

The new constitution, plus the initiation of local-level elections, opened up new opportunities for civic participation in governance. However, poor and marginalised citizens without political connections or links to traditional power structures still faced significant barriers to participation. Civil society used the opportunity created by the new laws to address social inequality, by supporting women living in poverty and exclusion, young people, *Dalits* and marginalised groups to stand for election and exercise their voting rights as informed citizens.

▶ **Building on a firm foundation**

For more than 10 years, civil society has been working to deepen participatory democracy in Nepal from a rights-based perspective, as well as the principle that the participation of people living in poverty in decision-making processes will encourage pro-poor policies and programmes. This has included conducting training and capacity-building programmes for people living in poverty to build their awareness of their rights and entitlements, and to build the skills and knowledge needed for citizens to claim those entitlements from government.

▶ **Thinking and acting politically**

When the election commission announced that local elections would be held, civil society groups sprang into action. With the initiation of elections came a new code of conduct and regulatory laws for local elections, which civil society organisations rapidly translated into user-friendly materials for civic education, such as posters and pamphlets. Local youth groups working with ActionAid directly engaged young people in 11 districts with information and awareness-raising sessions to encourage young people to understand what it means to stand for election, and to lodge their candidacy. The National Women's Rights Forum (a grassroots organisation working in 55 districts of Nepal) also organised awareness-raising and capacity-building sessions targeting marginalised women living in poverty. They also engaged with local media outlets and developed information, education and communication (IEC) materials focused on civic education and informing citizens about key highlights of political parties' manifestos.

The National Women's Rights Forum also organised more than 25 interface meetings with the major political parties, through which over 1,000 women, young people, *Dalits* and local citizens met with representatives of the political parties to find out about their policies and positions, how they were organising local candidacies, and what they were looking for from their candidates. A key purpose of these meetings was to disrupt traditional

structures of power and influence, by enabling women, *Dalits* and young people living in poverty to understand the political party process and be directly linked to political parties. The National Women's Rights Forum also submitted a memorandum to the election commission and political parties arguing for the maintenance of a free and fair electoral system.

► Showing results

The 2017 elections saw women making up just over 40% of all local elected representatives, with representatives of the *Dalit* community comprising 47% of women elected.²² Commentators have noted that the constitutional provisions were the main reason that so many women (and *Dalit* women) were elected, and in many cases the party candidates were women with political connections or elite educational backgrounds.²³ Despite this, the civic education action by civil society organisations saw marginalised people living in poverty, who would otherwise have been excluded from the political process, step up and lodge their candidacy.

From the programme facilitated by ActionAid, its partners and the National Women's Rights Forum, over 300 people living in poverty and exclusion who participated in the civic education and interface meetings (including women, young people and members of the *Dalit* community) were elected as people's representatives. This came from a pool of 648 people who nominated themselves as candidates following these programmes. Elected positions included chiefs and deputy chiefs of local government. Many of these people would have been unlikely to succeed in obtaining their party's nomination without the help of this programme, due to their lack of formal education, awareness or political connections.

Civic participation in voting was also strong among communities that participated in the programme – for example, 80% of citizens in Bajura district voted in the elections – the second highest number of voters of any electorate nationwide.

Samjhana's story

Samjhana Bhujel, a member of the Women's Rights Forum, began her interest in governance working as a REFLECT facilitator in local ActionAid partner organisation *Nari Bikash Sangh* in 2016.²⁴ She gained knowledge, awareness and skills on women's and children's rights, and community-level accountability work. After this training, Samjhana started working as a social worker, and saw the views of her family and community start to change. Having participated in training and awareness sessions on local elections, she was interested in contributing to government but was not able to secure a political party nomination as all spaces were filled. Despite this, she and her friends formed their own alliance and stood for election. Samjhana was elected as a Ward Member in Biratnagar Metropolitan City-19, while four of her friends were also elected to ward-level government positions. She has committed to continue to fight for the rights of women and children as her contribution to her ward. *"I am proud of the work I have done in the community, where there are more than 100 women who are rising up as leaders,"* said Samjhana.



▶▶ What's next?

Commentators have highlighted that, while the quota system has led to significant numbers of women in parliament, women are still very underrepresented in leadership roles, and the new elected representatives are likely to face discriminatory barriers in their own parties.²⁵ This highlights the need for continued and sustained education of citizens and government representatives to ensure they are equipped with the technical and procedural knowledge they need, and the skills they require, to promote the rights of people living in poverty. This is also an opportune moment to engage with all tiers of government (federal, provincial and local government) for legislation building and effective execution of the existing laws. ActionAid and its allies are now working to develop a structured training and mentoring programme for marginalised young people in local government, particularly young women, to ensure they are able to influence local government decisions and promote the rights of people living in poverty.

Lessons learned:

▶▶ Lessons learned from the case studies:

The case studies highlight several lessons on supporting youth movements and young people who are fighting for a seat at the table or a space in governance.

- **Promote agile movements:** informal social movements can allow for agile campaigning and break down some of the barriers that discourage or hinder young people from involvement in formalised institutions. Civil society organisations can support these social movements in a range of ways, including through resources, meeting spaces, funding and training. Such support can be effective where it does not force the movement to formalise, or stifle their voice, but provides resources and solidarity to build on the movement's strengths.
- **Engage politically:** to improve political representation of people living in poverty, it is necessary for young people to work politically – with, but outside, party politics. The case studies show how this can involve young people presenting their demands to political parties, bringing the political party process to communities, and supporting communities to understand political and electoral processes. Political work can complement other advocacy actions, including targeting government directly through media, public mobilisation and engagement in international spaces.
- **Give young people a seat at the table:** around the world young people are dramatically underrepresented in politics, and this underrepresentation threatens achievement of the SDGs. It is critical for civil society, governments and political parties to see young people as more than 'foot soldiers' or 'troublemakers' to be co-opted or controlled. Instead, young people should be given a seat at the decision-making table and an opportunity to shape the future they will inherit. Civil society organisations play an important role in standing with and supporting youth movements that are calling for a seat at the table – such as movements to increase political representation of young people.
- **Consider power:** the case study from Nepal highlights how electoral quotas alone are not enough to reduce inequality. It is important to address the cultural manifestations of patriarchy and the power that perpetrates them to ensure that marginalised groups are able to actively contribute when spaces are available to them.
- **Use an intersectional feminist approach:**²⁶ it is important to use an intersectional feminist approach when assessing the impact of existing initiatives on young people, and when planning new initiatives. Young people

are not a homogenous group and their experiences are different depending on their intersecting identities such as age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status. Policies and practice tend to replicate existing power imbalances. Civil society has a role to break down these power structures. This requires ensuring there is space for young people marginalised by their different identities.

►► Reflection from broader initiatives

Through its work on youth political participation, UNDP has observed a number of principles that should underlie support for young people's political participation, including that:

- support for young people should extend across the electoral cycle, as interventions that develop the capacity of young candidates to stand for office have more impact when undertaken continuously rather than as a one-off event shortly before an election
- youth political participation needs to be meaningful and effective, going beyond token gestures
- interventions to assist young people should be as youth-driven as possible.²⁷

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has also undertaken work to understand the impact of corruption within the political process on young people's participation, as well as the roles that young people can play in reducing corruption. Some of their observations link to the lessons from these case studies – namely that young people should be at the forefront of democratic processes, and that funding for young political candidates is important to support them to remain outside the influence of money in politics.²⁸

► Endnotes

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19. *Constitution of Nepal 2015*, Part 8, art 84. Unofficial English Translation by Nepal Law Society, UNDP and IDEA: <http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/Nepal/Nepalconst.pdf>
20. Refers to a group of people who are religiously, culturally, socially, economically and historically oppressed, excluded and treated as untouchables and they belong to different geographical region, language, culture and castes. See Dalit Welfare Organization: <http://dwo.org.np/dalit.php>
21. *Local Election Act 2017*, <http://www.election.gov.np/ecn/uploads/userfiles/sthaniyatahakonirwachanainpahilosansodhansahit.pdf> (Nepali), cited in Sangita Thebe Limbu, *Researching women's political inclusion in the 2017 local elections: some comments and findings*, UNDP Nepal Blog, 23 February 2018: <http://www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/blog/2018/researching-women-s-political-inclusion-in-the-2017-local-elections-some-comments-and-findings.html>
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23. Bholu Paswan, *Data reveals local elections a disaster for gender equality*, The Record. October 24, 2017. Available at <https://www.recordnepal.com/wire/features/data-reveals-local-elections-a-disaster-for-gender-equality/> ; Sangita Thebe Limbu, *Nepal's House of Cards: are women included or co-opted in politics?* London School of Economics Blog, 2 February 2018: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/02/02/nepals-house-of-cards-are-women-included-or-co-opted-in-politics-gender-female-representation-caste/>
24. REFLECT is an approach to learning and social change grounded in the principles of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and the methodologies of Participatory Rural Appraisal.
25. See Paswan (2018) and Limbu (2018), cited above.
26. 'Intersectionality' was first used by scholar and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 while still a student studying law. Intersectional feminism is an understanding that different forms of structural oppression overlap, meaning women, men and other gender groups do not experience life as homogenous groups. For example, Crenshaw found that African American women faced discrimination from both patriarchy and racism (and for some, classism too) which significantly impacted their access to justice, compared to other women. Intersectional feminism recognises that identities (education, race, age, geography, faith, caste, class, sexual identity, ability, gender, culture, language, ethnicity) are dynamic, they overlap and intersect, and are experienced with different intensity at different times. Therefore, privilege and power are not necessarily fixed, and their fluidity may affect one's understanding and perspective in a specific context.
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Young people holding their governments accountable for SDG commitments



The SDGs' promise of ending poverty while reducing inequality relies on state delivery of the social protection and public services needed to fulfil rights to education, health and sexual and reproductive services, water and sanitation, childcare, transport, bodily integrity and many more. Accountability mechanisms are essential to monitor governments' performance in delivering the goals, and national governments have employed a range of accountability mechanisms on the SDGs, with mixed levels of effectiveness in engaging civil society.¹² Youth-led development agency Restless Development has noted that, while almost all of the follow-up and review mechanisms relating to the SDGs either mandate for youth involvement and/or have invited young individuals to participate, none have involved young people in a systematic and sustained way (although youth engagement is increasing).¹³

The six case studies below highlight the work of young people in holding governments accountable for their performance on delivery of their SDG commitments – either directly, or through monitoring the delivery of public services and programmes essential to achieve the SDGs. The case studies from Kenya and Zambia, and the multi-country inequality research, demonstrate the use of research tools such as surveys and community scorecards to understand citizens' views on specific SDGs and present them to government. In Myanmar, communities captured their development priorities in Village Books, while in Tanzania, young people shared their demands directly with government through social media. In Bangladesh, young people worked with the national society coalition on the SDGs to hold political parties and government officials accountable through a national conference.





Kenya: young citizens lead on monitoring the SDGs at community-level

In 2016, the Government of Kenya launched a road map for implementation of the SDGs,¹⁴ committing to embed the SDGs into county and national development plans, engage stakeholders and build capacity to implement the SDGs at local level. This roadmap requires county-level governments to integrate SDGs into their local plans. However, most community members – particularly young people – have little awareness of these commitments or whether their county governments are implementing them.

To address this issue, during 2017 and 2018, communities in three counties: Baringo, Kilifi and Migori, monitored public service delivery and implementation of selected targets under SDGs 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 16 (peace, justice and democratic institutions). Communities employed an accountability methodology known as the Six Steps Methodology¹⁵ to build skills and understanding – especially of women and young people – on citizens’ roles in monitoring delivery of the SDGs. Citizens then used different social accountability tools such as citizens’ report cards, score cards and Citizens’ Charters of Demand to assess public services and deliver the community’s demands to government.

► Community demands leading to government action

In Kilifi County, in the coastal region of Kenya, the Kilifi Citizens’ Forum led a community scorecard assessment focused on SDG 16. The scorecard findings confirmed that most citizens have a basic but limited awareness of what the SDGs represent. Scorecards also found issues with corruption and accessibility of public services – for example, 27% of those surveyed said they had been forced to give a bribe to access public services. The majority of those surveyed wanted public participation institutionalised in revenue collection and expenditures, as well as making budget information public and funds used for their intended purposes. The analysis of the scorecard also showed that women’s inclusion and participation in governance processes is still minimal.¹⁶

Armed with the findings above, the Kilifi Citizens’ Forum developed a Citizens’ Charter of Demands with a number of clear recommendations to the county government, handing this to government officials in February 2018. To date, the Kilifi County government has implemented approximately 70% of the recommendations.¹⁷ For example, the county assembly has enacted the Public Participation Bill, responding to a demand in the Charter. The Charter also called for enhanced public awareness on the SDGs, as well as improved coordination around SDG monitoring, and greater involvement of citizens in decision-making. The county government has established a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and developed monitoring tools in collaboration with Kilifi Citizens’ Forum. Following a dialogue forum convened by the national government monitoring unit in the county, there is a push towards collaborative monitoring processes with greater citizen participation. ActionAid’s experience suggests citizens’ engagement in defining clear areas of change and tracking government progress towards the change is important to ensure no one is left behind.

In Baringo County, a similar citizen-led process saw the county government restructuring its procurement department, recruiting new employees and enhancing its project monitoring and evaluation. The county has also digitised its system for some fees and levies, reducing opportunities for corruption.

► Focusing on young people and women

In Migori County, the Activista network and the Kuria Social Accountability Network (KUSAN) conducted sensitisation sessions in 27 locations and surveyed women and young people on their experiences of service delivery and their participation in public affairs. The surveys found gaps in public participation – for example, of those who had participated in the development of the County Integrated Development Plan, only 35% were women and only 20% were young people.¹⁸ Young people also reported lower levels of access to services and interaction with their leaders than older people. Activista and KUSAN convened the Migori County government, civil society organisations and wider stakeholders and shared these findings – which were acknowledged as useful by government representatives. The county government has since activated its website and increased its use of community radio stations, notice boards and service charters to pass important information to citizens.

In Nairobi and Laikipia Counties, Activista members from tertiary institutions and grassroots communities replicated the youth-led accountability and monitoring processes, preparing their own Charters of Demand. Stella Mwangi, a member of Activista Nairobi who participated in the process, articulated one of the groups' key demands: *"I would tell people in power to listen to our ideas and take us seriously! Stop ignoring us! Appreciate the young people: we know more than you think we do"*.





Myanmar: from Village Books to Citizens' Charters

In Myanmar, a legacy of centrally-controlled government services and top-down governance has created barriers to citizens' participation in local-level decision making. Traditionally, citizens had little information on the workings of government, and few opportunities to have a say in local development priorities. With moves towards democratisation beginning in 2011 and Myanmar's first democratic elections in 50 years taking place in 2015, new opportunities for civic engagement are emerging. To take up these opportunities, it is critical that citizens are informed about their rights and entitlements, and equipped to hold their government to account for local service delivery.

► The Village Book

Since 2006, ActionAid has provided support to a network of 846 Fellows – young volunteer change-makers elected to facilitate participatory development processes. Fellows receive training in participatory rural appraisal techniques and other methods to guide and support community discussion, resource mapping and decision-making. Using these tools, Fellows have facilitated participatory discussions and debates within their villages on how public services are funded and allocated. In villages across 11 regions, these discussions have culminated in the production of a Village Book – a documentation of the community's resources, needs and priorities for development. Since 2012, 1,189 Village Books have been produced. As well as providing a mechanism for building community consensus, the Village Books have been shared with local township governments, leading to visible improvements in local-level services.

Young people are at the centre of developing the Village Book, bringing others in the community together and playing a key facilitation role. In doing so, they have not only built their own skills and confidence, but have also helped to change attitudes about what young people can and cannot do. The process has also helped to demonstrate the value of bottom-up development planning, something that has coincided with moves towards decentralisation at the government level. *"In the past I did not feel I had much value. Now I can see I am valuable for the village. My father always wanted his village to develop. I wish he could see how I am working on that now,"* said Hnin Pan Phyu, a Youth Fellow and leader of the Village Book process in Tha Yat Gwa Village of Myaing Township.

► Going beyond the village

Since 2016, this participatory citizen engagement in local governance has been strengthened through development of a key information resource. In late 2015, changes at national level led to a transition in management of the General Administration Department from military control to administration by the civilian government. Taking advantage of this opportunity, ActionAid supported the Township Administration Department in Pyapone District in the Irrawaddy region to develop a Citizens' Charter. The Citizens' Charter provides citizens with the information they need to access essential government services, and help government officials connect to each other more efficiently. The Charter maps public services that citizens are entitled to, including education, health and immigration services, providing information on how and where these services can be accessed. Young people, including Fellows, have been active in disseminating the Citizens' Charter in their respective communities, as well as building community understanding on the Charter and how to use it. This information allows communities to target their advocacy on the right service providers, and understand what their entitlements are so they can advocate for them.

An example of the impact of the Citizens' Charter is the effect it has had on people's ability to obtain identity cards. SDG Target 16.9 provides that by 2030, governments will provide legal identity for all people, including birth registration. In Myanmar, the national ID card is integral to many aspects of civic participation and inclusion, such

as voter registration and digital banking. However, in many parts of Myanmar getting an ID card is a daunting task, sometimes requiring people to travel for miles across difficult terrain to the nearest immigration department office, often to be turned away for lacking the necessary documents.

Following implementation of the Citizens' Charter in Pyapone, this situation dramatically improved. The government had planned an outreach visit to communities to support citizens to get ID cards – a process that usually results in around 150 new ID cards issued per visit. According to interviews in Pyapone, armed with the information in the Citizens' Charter, Fellows and volunteers worked with communities to ensure they understood what documents were needed to obtain ID cards, and also negotiated for government representatives to come to the community for a longer time than planned. As a result, government officers were able to issue a total of 1,600 cards over four days in communities in Pyapone. These citizens now enjoy greater freedom of movement, the ability to purchase property and other fundamental civic rights.

► Inspiring greater change

As well as improving accessibility of government services, both the Village Book and Citizens' Charter processes have improved civic awareness of young people and other citizens, thereby strengthening accountability at the local level. Citizens have developed a greater understanding of how their taxes are spent, what services they are entitled to, and to what standard.

Thanks to the learning process of making a Citizens' Charter in Pyapone, other local areas are starting to develop their own. For example, Meiktila District recently launched a Charter in hard copy and as an android app. The General Administration Department is also considering implementing this initiative nationally to help guide citizens through the process of accessing government services.



Fellows from Kayin State at the National Conference.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID



Watch: Video *Our Village Book: realising our dream:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rm3viJh7Xfw&t=64s>



Watch: Video *The change-maker:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldPoFSQcPLQ>



Download: Meiktila Citizens' Charter app on Google Play

<https://bit.ly/2YVURvR>



Tanzania: holding governments to account through social media

In Tanzania, ActionAid and Tanzania Youth Vision Association (TYVA)¹⁹ have been working together to support youths to demand their rights. Through this partnership, TYVA organised a social media campaign on reducing inequality through providing gender-responsive public services. The campaign involved citizens across the country sharing the context of basic services in their respective areas and demanding improvements, and duty bearers responded to some of the demands.

The hashtag #HudumaBoraZaJamii (quality public and social services) had 176 people actively participating and over 2,600 tweets and re-tweets of campaign messages. Starting with a group of 20 committed volunteers, the campaign eventually reached four million people, with 21 million impressions across Facebook and Twitter. Using social media, TYVA was able to reach a significantly greater number of citizens with its campaign than it could have done in-person, with very limited resources and only a small number of people.

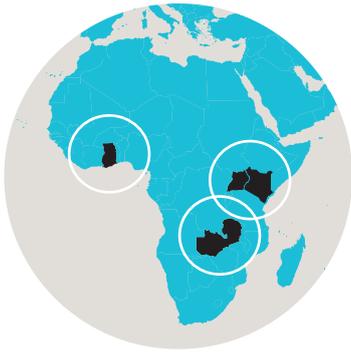
In recent years, Tanzania's shrinking civil society space has led to limitations on freedom of expression and posed challenges for traditional forms of public mobilisation. In this context, social media is growing in importance as an instrument for citizens to share their concerns directly with government and to hold government representatives accountable. TYVA leader Alfred Kiwuyo commented that, *“due to limited participation in governance issues, young people in Tanzania have found it very useful to engage with decision-makers on social media, and government institutions are opening social accounts to engage and find information about the perceptions of young people of the government's work. Many MPs are opening and running social media accounts because it is easy and fast to access youths on social media.”*

The #HudumaBoraZaJamii campaign kept supporters engaged by focusing on a different service each day, and encouraging people to come up with their own solutions to shared problems. Topics covered included education, health, infrastructure, industries and clean water. Young people did not just share their concerns – they also tagged MPs and government officials, bringing them directly into the discussion. In one exchange during the campaign, young people advocated for reconstruction of a bridge that had been damaged, and the MP for the relevant area responded by committing to provide resources.

TYVA has been encouraged that citizens have continued to use the #HudumaBoraZaJamii hashtag to demand delivery of social services. They are now looking at refining the campaign to focus on health, education and infrastructure – the three areas that generated the most discussion during the 2018 campaign. TYVA is planning to repeat and broaden the initiative in 2019, focusing on these three sectors and specifically targeting the ministers responsible.

Young partners at a advocacy training.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID





Uganda, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya: youth-led inequality research

In 2018, a group of 15 committed and talented young researchers from Uganda, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya came together to undertake a research project on **inequality**. The project used a youth-led research methodology, in which young people design research and generate and analyse data through taking the lead on key research activities. The project was based on toolkits developed by ActionAid and Restless Development that identify ways to put the principle of youth participation into practice in research.²⁰ The aim was to test approaches to strengthen young people's capacity to document, analyse and research issues in their own contexts, create new knowledge and use evidence for advocacy.



Capacity development training with young partners.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

► Building research skills and networks

The young researchers participated in two-week training in Uganda, during which time they strengthened their research skills, selected the research theme (one aspect of inequality to investigate), and developed the research design. They formed three research sub-teams focusing on economic inequality, political inequality and gender inequality. Each team included representatives of different countries. During the two-week period, the researchers also carried out field research in the Apac District in northern Uganda, using focus group discussion, observations and individual interviews.

After analysing the results, the team prepared an advocacy report and conducted a validation meeting to allow the local community to give feedback on the research findings. Based on this, they developed their calls for action – highlighting the community's proposed solutions and demands for economic, political and gender equality. Key demands covered measures needed to ensure young people's political participation, policies and programmes to create decent employment and economic opportunities for young people (such as more transparent recruitment processes), and policies and programmes to promote gender equality (such as women's land ownership).

▶ Sharing learning and conducting advocacy

The young researchers used what they had learned to share knowledge with other young people, facilitating step-down training, conducting further research in their communities, and using findings for advocacy.

Ugandan youth researchers used the research methods and findings to promote transparency and accountability and expose corruption in public institutions. Ugandan participants, working with Activista members, used interview techniques to conduct monitoring visits to government institutions and programmes, and to report corruption cases to the relevant authorities in 17 districts where the Citizens' Actions for Greater Accountability and Improved Public Service Delivery (CAIPS) project is being implemented.²¹ The corruption reports by young people triggered further investigation, which led to the interdiction of three government employees in Kapchorwa in the Eastern Region.²² Young researchers from Uganda also advocated on gender equality by speaking on radio about inequality, petitioning against harmful traditional practices, and engaging with traditional leaders in their community on distribution of land and resources.

Ghanaian young researchers trained five more young people in Ghana and conducted research on economic and gender inequality experienced by young people in Northern Region and in the capital city, Accra. Based on four focus groups with 24 young people and two interviews, the research findings showed – in a small sample – some different youth experiences of inequality between urban and rural communities. The team is now planning to present the research findings and recommendations to the local National Youth Authority to push for revised labour policies and programmes.

Zambian young researchers trained four more young people and conducted research on the political and economic inequalities facing young people in the capital, Lusaka. One of the participants works with youth social movement Youth4Parliament (see case study above) and plans to use the research skills developed to support their work influencing political party manifestos in the lead-up to Zambia's 2021 elections.

Kenyan young researchers trained 10 Activista members in Nairobi and conducted research on political inequality. They engaged about 70 people through focus groups and interviews and gathered young people's experiences in representation in elective bodies, as well as exploring solutions to increase youth representation in elective positions. Solutions that the young people generated included that the government and political parties should:

- adopt a public participation policy that advances young people's and women's participation
- allocate resources to build capacity of young people and women who serve as elected or nominated officials
- enforce compliance with the Electoral Code of Conduct and include a provision relating to gender-based violence
- reform the culture and practices of political parties.

The research findings were used to advocate for youth participation in politics on social media, and for campaign planning.

Each of the research examples given is very small-scale. However, with even these examples we can see the additional transformative impact of research being people-led rather than led by academic researchers; actively leading the reflection-action processes has meant that the young researchers are more able to take action themselves, and are building solidarity networks with others to ensure a movement for change builds momentum.



Bangladesh: young people convening to demand political action

Although around one-third of Bangladesh's population is between 15 and 35 years old,²³ structures and processes leading to national-level decisions are not designed to involve and accommodate the voices of young people – especially those who are further marginalised due to their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status.

Since the commencement of the SDGs, with their commitment to partnership and inclusion, civil society in Bangladesh has been promoting inclusion of young people's voices in national SDG implementation through training and skill-sharing among young people, supporting youth-led research and accountability processes, developing platforms for youth leadership, and facilitating marginalised young people's access to decision-makers.

► The power of alliances

ActionAid is a member of the Bangladesh Citizens' Platform for SDGs – a network of over 90 civil society and private sector organisations working to contribute to SDG implementation and to enhance accountability. Youth champions within the platform worked together to develop plans for the platform's 2018 annual national conference, to be focused on young people. 'Bangladesh and Agenda 2030: Aspirations of the Youth' was held in November 2018 and engaged over 2,000 young people from across the country – including 800 from rural areas. Young people were not just participants – young women and grassroots youth leaders were also pivotal in planning the agenda, organising the event and facilitating sessions. The conference also saw strong interest from government and the media, with 37 government officers and officials and over 100 journalists participating.

Young people and their coalitions advocating for gender equality.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID



Young partners meeting duty bearers.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID



► Using electoral processes

The conference was held at a strategically important time – a little over one month before Bangladesh’s national elections. In preparing for the conference, a group of young activists from the Activista network reviewed the election manifestos of the major political parties, in order to assess each party’s commitment to youth development. The team identified the areas where each party had made commitments, then worked with other young partners in four districts across Bangladesh to interview young people about the achievements and gaps they saw in implementation of these commitments. This information, including the demands and recommendations from young people who were interviewed, was developed into a report for the SDG Platform and the national conference. Many of the young people’s demands and recommendations were included in [conference’s final declaration](#).²⁴

► Engaging leaders

As well as the political analysis from Activista, the national conference engaged young people in discussions on issues ranging from young people’s role in innovation, to how to better include young people in decision-making structures. The conference published [13 policy reports](#)²⁵ canvassing young people’s engagement in the SDGs and national development, as well as a research report on youth employment. The culmination of the conference was a [Youth Declaration](#),²⁶ in which young people synthesised their key recommendations and demands for policymakers. The Youth Declaration was delivered at the close of the conference to the national government’s chief coordinator on the SDGs, who made a commitment to ensure the inclusion of young people in SDG processes.

Conference attendee Atika Khan, an Activista member and undergraduate student at Dhaka University, said: *“The youth conference created scope for young women and men to come together to share their activities, demands and ideas and to build a network. I appreciate the way this conference on young people and SDGs in the context of Bangladesh acknowledged the perception and voices of young persons like myself. This conference gave reorganisation of the youth voice in national policies.”*



Find the National Youth SDG Conference papers, reports and other materials here:
<https://youthconf18.bdplatform4sdgs.net>

Complementing this work, ActionAid co-convened a roundtable with national media outlets to share policy recommendations on the importance of young people's inclusion in political processes and party manifestos. This roundtable resulted in national media coverage, further strengthening the call for young people's inclusion.

Shifting power nationally and globally: bringing young people's voices to different duty bearers

As well as supporting the national conference, ActionAid also facilitated youth engagement in the South Asia Sub Regional Forum on the SDGs, organised by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in October 2018. Swarna Moyee Sarka, a young Activista member, has been active on the SDGs since 2017, working with other young people to monitor local-level implementation, and facilitating training for young people on the SDGs and their implementation at local level. Swarna's active participation in the Sub Regional Forum saw her contributions reflected in the final statement, which will ultimately feed into the Asia-Pacific regional report to the High Level Political Forum on the SDGs.

Following this, Nazmul Ahsan, Youth Manager at ActionAid Bangladesh, attended the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and shared experiences from the Bangladesh situation, particularly issues on SDG 8 and young people's engagement in decent work, as a part of a panel. APFSD is the primary platform in the Asia and Pacific region through which governments and civil society come together to discuss the progress and implementation of the SDGs in the region, and develops a set of recommendations to address in the upcoming High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

► From action to impact

Following the national conference, the SDG Platform promoted the Youth Declaration among the major political parties in the lead-up to the national election. Several of the demands from young people have now been reflected in these parties' new post-election manifestos and commitments. For example, the current government has committed to seven new youth initiatives, including opening a youth training centre in every *upazila* (sub-district) and developing a national research centre for youth.²⁷ These commitments represent a significant step forward, and demonstrate the power that alliances of youth and civil society can wield.

Young leaders who are advocating for ending violence against women and girls for a just and equal society.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID





Zambia: youth-led SDG monitoring

Zambia's Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP), launched in 2017, is a key mechanism through which Zambia has domesticated its SDG commitments. Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia (AAAZ)²⁸ has mobilised over 1,000 young people from across the country to engage in accountability and monitoring of both the SDGs and the 7NDP.

During 2017, AAAZ developed the Youth-Led SDG Monitoring Framework through a collaborative process, resulting in a tool that young people can share and use to guide their accountability work. In 2018, AAAZ also created platforms for young people to engage with policymakers on the 7NDP and SDGs, such as convening a roundtable dialogue that included young people, representatives of relevant ministries – including the Ministry of Sports, Youth and Child Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Local Government – the National Youth Development Council, UN agencies, NGOs and others. AAAZ has also undertaken training to build young people's capacity to advocate for implementation of the SDGs and 7NDP in their local areas.

Since AAAZ and their young members started this process, the Ministry of National Planning (which coordinates the NDP) has set up formal committees to monitor implementation of the 7NDP, and has involved young people in all the relevant committees. This has represented a significant step forward in youth engagement in this important policy process in Zambia.

AAAZ's work has shown Zambian policymakers that young people have the capacity to run their own agenda and to take the lead from their own platform. ActionAid Youth Coordinator Prisca Sikana puts it succinctly: *"the work of AAAZ shows that the days of adults setting the agenda for young people are past. When young people have the space, they are able to lead, set the agenda and have influence. For the SDGs, young people have started influencing the process early and are setting the agenda for the whole country. Our best role is to support them."*

Lessons learned:

▶▶ Lessons learned from the case studies:

The case studies above highlight some specific lessons for civil society organisations supporting young people's work to hold governments accountable for delivery of the SDGs:

- **Support young people to engage in local governance:** although the SDGs are an international framework, many national governments are linking SDGs to national development plans and priorities, which in turn are implemented by local agencies or governments. Governments should use participatory approaches (planning and budgeting, open budget discussions, etc.) to engage with civil society, with young people as core, and ensure their voices are heard in the implementation process. For young people and the organisations that support them, SDG commitments can be used as a tool to hold local-level duty bearers to account for provision of public services at local level and to demand inclusion of marginalised citizens in governance.
- **Support youth-led processes:** enabling young people to develop the skills and tools to design and lead their own research and accountability projects strengthens their understanding of the issues in their context

and inspires them to develop initiatives (like the youth-led inequality research discussed above) that are fully youth-owned and reflect the concerns most important to young people's lives. This in turn allows young people to develop the evidence base they need to take action and fuel effective lobbying and advocacy for their rights and entitlements.

- **Use multiple approaches:** achieving lasting and systemic change requires persistence, and fighting a battle on multiple fronts. In the case studies in this section, young people and civil society organisations used a wide range of research and accountability tools to gather evidence, and targeted duty bearers through multiple methods at once: lobbying government directly, political parties, media, public mobilisation and engagement in international spaces – with multiple organisations taking up the same demands. Young people used invited spaces (such as official forums and consultations in Bangladesh) as well as claiming their own spaces for action.

► Reflections from broader initiatives

In recent years, a number of organisations have specifically considered the role of young people in official and unofficial SDG accountability mechanisms. For example the UN World Youth Report 2018, *Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, has commented on the need to strengthen the mechanisms that enable young people to engage in policies and initiatives around sustainable development. In particular, the report argues for young people's involvement in national sustainable development coordination councils, policymakers working with national youth councils, expanding opportunities for youth representation, and ensuring young people are contributing to Voluntary National Reviews.²⁹

Plan International, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth also argued, in the lead-up to the adoption of Agenda 2030, for strong accountability mechanisms that provide effective platforms for the meaningful participation of young people.³⁰ Specifically, they recommended two key priorities for strengthening accountability at the national and local level: engaging with young people in bottom-up approaches to development, and creating an enabling environment that facilitates inclusive, participatory and accountable governance.³¹ They also identified four principles for accountability mechanisms relating to the SDGs. Mechanisms should be: participatory, inclusive (of diverse young people), accessible (to urban and rural young people and those with low literacy), collaborative and responsive (i.e.: the concerns of young people should be listened to and acted on).

Restless Development has recommended three approaches – on a sliding scale of ambition – to embed young people within formal and informal approaches to monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs:

- Proposal 1: youth representatives are invited to monitor the goals, expanding on current opportunities for youth input into state-led mechanisms.
- Proposal 2: young people create their own spaces, mechanisms and evidence to hold government accountable (a bottom-up approach based on empowering young people and linking citizen-led processes to state processes).
- Proposal 3: youth-led paradigm shift on accountability (building an inclusive and society-wide embedded accountability approach).³²

▶ Endnotes

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Young leaders supporting social inclusion



SDG 10, target 10.2 commits states to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status. This goes beyond ensuring better income distribution and political representation, although these are key elements needed for achievement of this target, and requires shifting social norms and discriminatory barriers to ensure meaningful participation in society for all.

The case studies in this section highlight examples of young people taking leadership roles in initiatives that aim to strengthen social inclusion of marginalised and disadvantaged groups. In Jordan and in the multi-country project working with LGBTQ activists, young women and men worked for stronger inclusion of marginalised groups, first within safe spaces, and then extending that work into the broader community. The Palestine case study highlights a youth group working to bring educational infrastructure and services to their disadvantaged rural community.





Jordan: fostering young people's leadership through safe spaces

For young people in Jordan, a number of constraints impact on their civic space. The increase in civil society activity and supportive policy space for NGOs that followed the Arab Spring in 2010 and 2011 has given way to a gradual tightening of restrictions on civil society action. Freedom of assembly is limited by government restrictions, and there are also restrictions on freedom of association, as the government oversees CSO registration processes and receipts of funding. On top of this, young people struggle to find work – 35.6% of young people aged 15-24 are unemployed.¹² The situation is worse for young women – Jordan has one of the lowest rates of female labour force participation in the world.¹³

With its location as a historic migration crossroads, and sharing a border with several countries experiencing conflict, Jordan is the top refugee-hosting country in the world. At its last census, 31% of its population was made up of migrants.¹⁴ Since 2011 Jordan has seen the displacement of population from Syria, which has created pressure on the nation in terms of management of resources, support to refugees and managing relationships between host and refugee communities.

► Developing safe spaces for youth

As part of strengthening young people's active citizenship, ActionAid has supported a youth hub in Amman and community centres in Mafraq and Zarqa. In these centres, young people from diverse backgrounds come together to participate in a range of training and workshops – including workshops on youth community engagement, facilitating community change, action research and art, music and video campaigning. Young people have built skills and confidence, with many starting as training participants and going on to become training facilitators and group leaders. Young people have also used the hub and community centres to develop and launch their own campaigns and initiatives to strengthen accountability, human rights and social inclusion in their communities. Through the hub and community centres, young people have also become involved in initiatives around election monitoring, and joined campaigns to encourage young people to engage in Jordan's 2017 local elections.



Young people in the new Liwan Hub.
PHOTO: TAMMEY/ACTIONAID

A young woman using her voice for accountability

Saba 'Al-Khalayleh, a journalism student in Zarqa, was one of a group of 22 young women and 28 young men who participated in a local election observation initiative in 2017 organised through ActionAid's Youth Empowerment and Engagement project. Following two days of training covering different types of electoral procedure violations and abuses, Saba was registered as an official election observer. The training served her well when, during the observation, Saba observed an irregularity. In a tense moment, Saba asked the government representative to recount the polls, and was told that if she was incorrect, she would be asked to leave the room. Her observation was correct. *"I ended up being allowed to stay in the room and the government representative thanked me in front of everyone, even though he had previously put me in a very embarrassing situation. I insisted on my point of view and the result was really satisfying."*

Saba says that if she were to participate again in the electoral process, she would be even more rigorous and precise, and encourages other young women to participate in political activities.

"So many men and women, we have lots of energy to invest in change processes and we should make the best use of this. I have personally struggled with my family's complete refusal to attend events, initiatives and civil society activities. But I overcame this with love, dedication and belief in the importance of my role as a young woman in this area. I want to prove to everyone that we – the youth – have a crucial role in society and the right to lead and contribute to our community."

Connecting diverse communities.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID



► Moving towards greater youth ownership

In 2017, ActionAid formed a partnership with youth organisation Tammey for Human Development to establish a youth-led space in Amman. Tammey facilitated a participatory co-creation process, selecting 12 volunteers to lead the hub's development, researching successful youth hub models overseas, and facilitating a reflection process with young people.

Through this process, young people developed a plan for a youth hub with four functions: a safe space, networking platform, learning opportunities and support to youth social innovation. Reem Khashman, a member of the co-creation team, commented: *"The team worked for three months to create a youth space by young people for young people, something more than just a physical place, a place where you give in and take"*. Tammey's Co-Founder, Rana H Taher, also commented on the power of a safe space: *"The hub provides a physical (safe) space where young people can freely convene, meet, discuss, debate and organise into groups and initiatives to actively engage in their communities," he said. "There is a difference between a place and a space. While the place provides a physical location, the space is created by those who interact in it."*

The new Amman Youth Hub, called *"Liwan"*, formally opened in August 2018. It is managed cooperatively by a committee of 5-7 members elected from the youth hub community. The *Liwan* aims to tackle inequality by welcoming all young people regardless of their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic status or citizenship, and by promoting young women's leadership. One of the core members of the group that co-created *Liwan* was a person with a disability, who provided valuable input to ensure the space is accessible to all.

Experimentation has been a key value of the *Liwan* hub. Taher explains, *"the hub welcomes youth's new ideas and alternative visions, as long as they are related to their growth and their communities' development. Therefore, it operates on the basis of an open door policy for youth-led ideation, activism and initiatives. In the hub, there is no space to judge the quality of their activism, but rather youth will find a space of learning from their mistakes and unleash their potential."*

Follow Liwan youth hub:



@liwanspace



<https://www.facebook.com/LiwanSpace/>



Read a profile of Raheil Barakat, a member of the *Liwan* co-creation team, and her experience participating in a learning exchange with a youth hub in Denmark:

<https://arab-region.actionaid.org/stories/2019/love-voluntary-work>



Multi-country project: fostering young people's leadership through safe spaces

In 2017 ActionAid, in partnership with All Out,¹⁵ initiated a project aimed at strengthening the LGBTQ rights movement in Kenya and the broader region by supporting networking and activism skills-sharing and training for 75 human rights activists. Having previously worked with many LGBTQ activists on women's rights, healthcare and education, ActionAid was motivated to work more closely in partnership with a global LGBTQ movement on a project explicitly addressing

LGBTQ issues. The programme has continued to grow and flourish, forging powerful alliances between progressive religious leaders and LGBTQ activists, and bridging divides.

► Building skills and alliances to strengthen activism

The initiative started as a one-year programme of training, organising and working with social networks. Training covered digital security, public mobilisation and creative non-violent action for promotion of LGBTQ rights. Attendees were from more than 50 organisations across several countries, with participants selected in collaboration with local LGBTQ partners. Based on risk analysis, measures were taken to protect the privacy and security of participants and ensure the workshops were a safe space.

► Sparking collaboration

The young activists who participated in the training programme have since undertaken activities reaching over 10,000 people in the region. The activists organised Pride Uganda 2017, blogged coming out stories, successfully fundraised for their organisations, created activist songs and organised social media campaigns. For example, after the training, the grassroots Ugandan organisation Makasa KP HIV Prevention and Support Organisation (MAHIPSO)¹⁶ broadened its mandate to campaign against intimate partner violence in the LGBTQ community – an issue that is often sidelined in conversations about domestic and family violence. Collaborations forged during the programme also led participants to share their stories online to inspire others and improve media representation of LGBTQ communities.

Read:

-  Profile of MAHIPSO's founder Joseph Ssemanda in the Rustin Times: <https://bit.ly/2Z56ReC>
-  Profile of Gerald Hayo of Girls' Pride Kenya, an organisation supporting LGBTQ girls and women from underserved communities: <https://bit.ly/2JUN6CK>
-  Listen: Song 'Love is Love' created by activists participating in the training: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4G3PCFLGjXtQVdyRG8zQUppVE0/view>

► Strengthening alliances in Kenya

This one-year training programme has also sparked a continued and deepened programme of support for youth-led LGBTQ activism in Kenya.

Power mapping undertaken by the activists identified media, religious institutions, policymakers and community leaders as key influential stakeholders with the power to change law, policy and social norms on LGBTQ issues in Kenya. Based on feedback from the activists, ActionAid reached out to progressive religious leaders from both the Christian and Muslim communities to convene discussions between religious leaders and activists. The first discussion was difficult for both groups, and required each to ‘translate’ their views and ideas for the other and to challenge their own perceptions. The safe space of these initial dialogues helped to put a human face to a political issue, and provided an opportunity for some religious leaders to come out as members of the LGBTQ community themselves. As one activist commented, *“I will stop seeing religious leaders as the enemy but as people who don’t have enough knowledge of LGBTQ. I will start (...) to understand them and put myself in their shoes”*. A religious leader participating in the dialogues said, *“I will advocate to appreciate LGBTIQ (people) for I am equipped with the knowledge I will be associating with LGBTQ and help them where I can.”*

The project in Kenya has managed to form a well-functioning alliance between religious leaders and activists. As powerful opinion formers, religious leaders have been able to start discussions on LGBTQ rights in spaces that LGBTQ activists would not be welcome, and from a position of influence and authority. This alliance has been instrumental in supporting strategic litigation led by the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission aiming to overturn the penal code provisions criminalising homosexuality. For example, religious leaders from the alliance have testified in the case and supported scripture analysis, which has been a component of the arguments. This case also opened up opportunities for broader community awareness-raising on LGBTQ issues. The court is scheduled to deliver its verdict in mid-2019.

► Next steps

Over time the project aims to support a stronger sub-regional alliance of different actors in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda – including media policymakers, religious leaders and LGBTQ organisations, working to strengthen LGBTQ rights. Small initiatives started by this project, such as changing training registration forms to recognise gender identities beyond male and female, are the building blocks for shifting power.





Palestine: young people forging partnerships for education

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, although literacy levels are high, the education system is in disrepair largely as a result of the effects of the Israeli occupation, which has led to a lack of school infrastructure, not enough trained teachers and a lack of access to schooling in marginalised areas.¹⁸ This problem has been acutely felt by young people in Abda and Immriesh, neighbouring villages in the Dura region, located 10 kilometres southwest of the city of Hebron in the southern part of Palestine. The villages are home to a strong and active youth group that has successfully mobilised funds and people power to improve education for the next generation of students.

Members of the Abda and Immriesh youth group helping with construction of the new school.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID



► Starting small

The youth group in Abda and Immriesh was established over four years ago. It was the first of its kind and it provided young people with a safe space to discuss matters related to their community and the challenges they were experiencing. The group, which has 15 active members (eight young men and seven young women) used the Reflection-Action participatory methodology and tools to work together to analyse their situation, know their rights and develop the power and skills to demand action. ActionAid has supported the group with skills-training and linkages to different stakeholders, including the Abda and Immriesh village council, Ministry of Education, South Hebron Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Palestinian Business Forum.

Based on their participatory priority setting, the group identified education as the key issue hindering young people in their village. The group prioritised support to the local school, volunteering and bringing in donations to support the school's overall education efforts, to add new, more appealing, education methods and to provide extra-curricular activities for the students.

However, this support was not enough to meet the most urgent need: extra classrooms to provide classes in the village past the tenth grade. Without local facilities, students at the Abda and Immriesh school were forced to complete the last two years of school in one of the nearby villages, the closest of which is a four-kilometre walk away. To complete school, many students had to walk this distance or further twice each day in the heat of summer or the cold rainy winter.

►► Building trust

The youth group's history of work in the community earned them the trust and support of a local donor, who pledged to donate US\$8,000 so the group could build new classrooms in Abda and Immriesh school. Seizing this opportunity, the youth group formed a construction committee, and put in place an accountable and transparent system to monitor and manage expenditures.

However, the initial amount, while a much-needed start, was not even close to enough to build the classrooms. As such, the youth group initiated a fundraising campaign targeting people in the village, community leaders, religious leaders, private sector and other organisations. Together, the group raised the additional funds needed to reach the cost of construction – around US\$50,000.

The project's success gave the community much more than a building: it also changed the community's views on what young people could contribute and achieve. One of the active members of the group, Salamah Sharawi, commented: *"other youth groups in nearby communities were impressed by our success and they started coming to us for advice and support. Also, some youths came to us to help them form their own youth groups."*

►► Scaling up

These approaches can only have limited success if the structural issues that are causing schools to be underfunded are not addressed. This was the youth group's next mission; they continued their work seeking more support, specifically for education that has been hampered by financial limitations. With this in mind, youth group members met with officials of the Palestinian Ministry of Education to share information about the situation, what they have achieved, and what is still needed. The discussions have been fruitful and the group will continue their advocacy with the Ministry for greater investment in education in their area.

"I am proud of my group, proud of the people and proud of my community who supported us financially and morally despite their initial scepticism. I am thankful to ActionAid for their support and helping us in developing our skills and linking us with key people." said Salamah. "I am confident that we will continue working hard to develop our community and bring out the spirit of belonging and cooperation among us."

Lessons learned:

► Lessons learned from the case studies:

The above case studies highlight a number of lessons for working with young people to reduce social exclusion. They highlight ways in which youth activism and leadership can create change at both local and national levels, and how civil society groups can foster and support youth-led spaces.

- **Create and protect safe spaces:** safe spaces for young people can provide opportunities to strengthen social inclusion of young people from marginalised or socially excluded groups, by providing opportunities for them to share experiences with others and develop their own leadership skills. In doing so, the safe spaces also allow young people to build the networks they need to challenge their limited civic space at the national level. Supporting young people's empowerment effectively means more than facilitating opportunities for young people to speak within existing spaces: it also means giving control of those spaces to young people themselves.
- **Act-reflect-learn-act:** supporting youth groups, networks and movements is a long-term process. As shown in the case study from Palestine, the processes of building a democratic and safe space for reflection, understanding the context and planning for action all contribute to building trust and confidence among group members, and developing thoughtful and impactful actions. Reflecting and learning from these actions is as important as the action itself. This iterative process takes time, but can be helpful in moving from local problems to eventually addressing the structural causes of poverty and injustice.
- **Build unlikely solidarity alliances:** building unlikely alliances outside of activist silos was essential to the success of the Kenyan LGBTQ activists profiled in the above case study. This required time, patience and sensitivity – but the benefits of this convening and dialogue have lasting effects well beyond the project itself. Collaboration is critical. When civil society groups work collaboratively with each other and with a broad range of allies, it can have a transformative impact at local and national levels.
- **Ensure safeguarding:** tight security, risk mitigation and safeguarding measures are important when working with human rights defenders. For example, in the multi-country project supporting LGBTQ activists, participants were selected in collaboration with local LGBTQ partners, and a context analysis and risk assessment undertaken in all three countries in consultation with LGBTQ communities. All communication was strictly private, invitations used broad wording to protect the safety of border crossings to Kenya, location was revealed last minute to invited participants only, and identities were only revealed at the site. Strict rules were established around sharing of pictures and information.

► Reflections from broader initiatives

A number of organisations have opened up spaces for youth leadership within or alongside their organisation to ensure that youth voices are part of decision-making. For example, CIVICUS organises a Youth Assembly (usually biennially) to provide a space for young people to engage in civil society discussions. In 2013, recognising the need to reflect young people's important role in civil society within the organisation itself, CIVICUS established a Youth Advisory Group (now the Youth Action Team), with representation on the CIVICUS Board of Directors.¹⁹ The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) has a young feminist activist programme, created to make sure the voices of young women are heard and reflected in feminist discourse.²⁰ This programme initiated Young Feminist Wire,²¹ an online community that provides a space for young feminists to share resources, tools

and news; connect and collaborate; and raise the visibility of young feminist activism.²² Amnesty International has developed a Youth Strategy 2017-2020, which sets the direction and provides a framework for youth work at the global, regional and national levels. As well as identifying youth-related priorities for external work, the strategy also sets out goals for strengthening youth membership and including young people in leadership and decision-making structures within the organisation.²³

In its global research on inequality, Oxfam has made a number of recommendations for civil society organisations working with youth on initiatives to reduce inequality, many of which reflect the experiences in the above case studies:

- Work with youth as partners and keep them involved from start to finish.
- Look beyond official youth groups for youth-led grassroots projects to support.
- Work with youth, educators and decision-makers to shift norms and behaviours regarding gender role stereotypes, and to encourage all to value the equal rights of girls in society.
- Facilitate safe environments for young people to engage with other civil society actors and government institutions, in which they can develop their capacities, skills and confidence.
- Support the development of an enabling environment for young people to participate meaningfully by engaging constructively with adults who hold decision-making power.
- Actively work to ensure that programmes and activities are not maintaining or replicating pre-existing inequalities that affect youth.²⁴

► Endnotes

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ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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