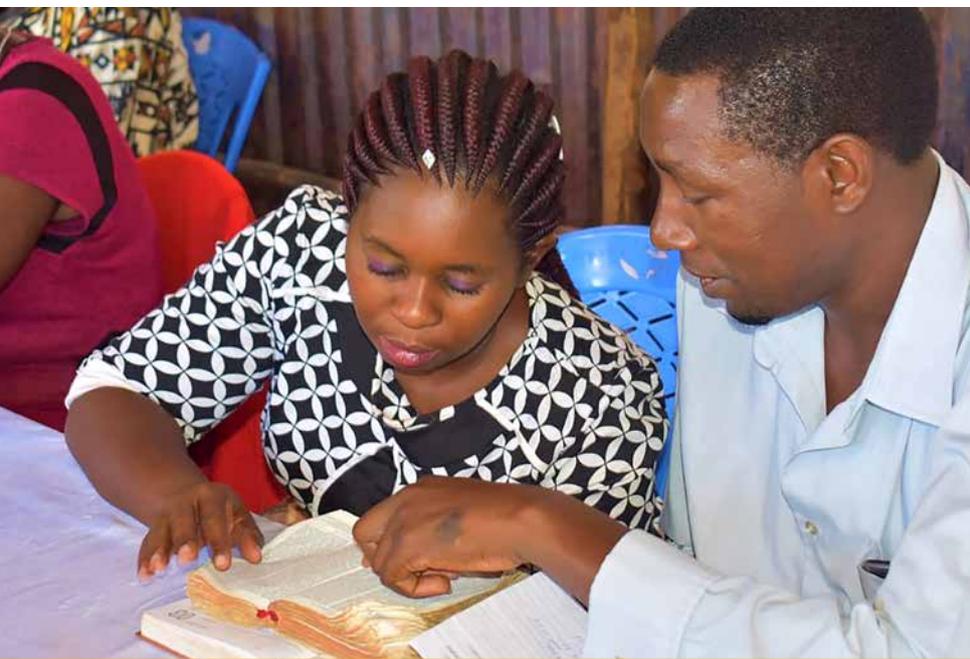


# **Champions and change-makers:**

**Young people fighting for representative democracies**



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



## Acknowledgements

**Written by:** Fyfe Strachan

**Project Manager:** Sesheeni Joud Selvaratnam, ActionAid Denmark

**Edited by:** Stephanie Ross

**Design by:** [www.NickPurserDesign.com](http://www.NickPurserDesign.com)

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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

|                |                                                                   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>HLPF</b>    | High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development             |
| <b>IEC</b>     | Information, Education, Communication                             |
| <b>SCEEP</b>   | Strengthening Citizens' Engagement in Electoral Processes program |
| <b>SDGs</b>    | Sustainable Development Goals                                     |
| <b>UNDP</b>    | United Nations Development Programme                              |
| <b>UNFPA</b>   | United Nations Population Fund                                    |
| <b>YIAGA</b>   | Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement             |
| <b>ZANU-PF</b> | Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front                 |

## Glossary

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Activista</b>         | 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.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Global Platforms</b>  | <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"><li>• Provide innovative, creative and quality-based capacity-building for young people to lead social, political and economic change.</li><li>• Support dynamic and democratic youth hub spaces where global and local young people can network, share visions, act and develop together.</li><li>• Connect local and global struggles.</li></ul>                |
| <b>Reflection-Action</b> | <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>, <a href="http://www.networkedtoolbox.com/pages/about-reflection-action/">http://www.networkedtoolbox.com/pages/about-reflection-action/</a></p> |



# Introduction

**With the adoption of the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development* in September 2015,<sup>1</sup> 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.*”<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> and 89% of people aged 10-24 living in the Global South,<sup>5</sup> young people<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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%.<sup>8</sup> Growing up in an increasingly unequal world, young people face high rates of unemployment: 60% of young people aged 15-24 are jobless.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 4 ActionAid and partner programmes Nepal, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe – all working on governance processes related to the SDGs, particularly 5 (gender), 10 (inequality) and 16 (peace, justice and democratic institutions). 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.

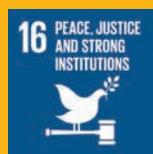
## Emerging issues for discussion and questions:

- **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



# 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.<sup>12</sup> 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 contract<sup>13</sup> 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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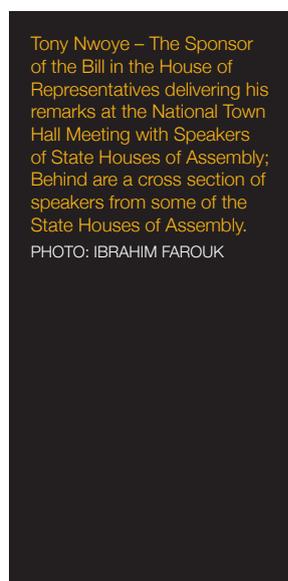
## Nigeria: Not Too Young to Run

Nigeria's Not Too Young to Run campaign aimed to reduce the constitutional age limit for running for office in Nigeria.<sup>14</sup> Started in May 2016 by a network of civil society organisations, with the leadership of the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA)<sup>15</sup>, 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 campaign<sup>16</sup> sponsored by the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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*<sup>20</sup> caste. In rural municipalities there must be one female position holder between mayor and deputy mayor (and chair and deputy chair).<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.

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## 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:**<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup>

## ► 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](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](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 refer to all those in this group with their multiple different identities (race, ethnicity, disability, religion, economic, class, geography, religion, sexual identity).
7. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) *Youth Participation in National Parliaments*, Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-12/youth-participation-in-national-parliaments-2018> at p.
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.
9. *Ibid*, at p. 45.
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](https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2018/socs-2018-overview_top-ten-trends.pdf)
11. See ActionAid & OECD Development Communication Network (2015) *Beyond smiling faces: How engaging with youth can help transform societies and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, available at: [http://www.oecd.org/dev/pgd/OECD\\_AA%20Youth%20Policy%20Note\\_141015.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dev/pgd/OECD_AA%20Youth%20Policy%20Note_141015.pdf)
12. Central Statistical Office (CSO) [Zambia], Ministry of Health (MOH) [Zambia], and ICF International. 2014. *Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013-14*. Rockville, Maryland, USA: Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Health, and ICF International, available at: <https://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/fr304/fr304.pdf>, at p. 22.
13. Available at: <https://youth4parliament.com/2018/09/02/secretary-generals-sign-a-social-contract-with-youth-4-parliament/>
14. From 30 to 25 years for House of Representatives and House of Assembly, 35 to 30 for Senate and Governorship and 40 to 30 for the Presidency.
15. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/yiaga.org/>
16. Available at: <http://www.nottooyoungtorun.org/about/>
17. Available at: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/>
18. See Ready to Run, *Youth candidacy in the 2019 presidential and national assembly elections*, <https://readytorunng.org/youth-candidacy-in-the-2019-presidential-and-national-assembly-elections/> (accessed 25 March 2019) and Ruth Tene Natsu, *Youths constitute highest population of voters for 2019 elections*, The Leadership, 6 February 2019, <https://leadership.ng/2019/02/06/youths-constitute-highest-population-of-voters-for-2019-elections-nbs/>
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>
22. 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>
23. Bhola 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.
27. UNDP (2013) *Enhancing youth participation throughout the electoral cycle: a good practice guide*, New York: UNDP at p. 3, available at: [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG\\_UN-Youth\\_Guide-LR.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG_UN-Youth_Guide-LR.pdf)
28. International IDEA (2018) *Youth participation in political processes: second annual summer school for young leaders for African political parties*. Stockholm: International IDEA, at p. 6, available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/youth-participation-in-political-processes.pdf>

**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.

<http://actionforglobaljustice.actionaid.org>

International Registration number: 27264198

Website: **[www.actionaid.org](http://www.actionaid.org)**

Telephone: **+27 11 731 4500**

Fax: **+27 11 880 8082**

Email: **[mailjhb@actionaid.org](mailto:mailjhb@actionaid.org)**

ActionAid International Secretariat,  
Postnet Suite 248, Private Bag X31, Saxonwold 2132,  
Johannesburg, South Africa.