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Introduction [1]



NDI has been active in supporting youth political participation for more than 30 years across 70 countries through assistance to civic groups, political parties, and legislatures. During that time, global demographic shifts, the spread of technology and new media, violent conflicts, and other dynamics have generated new challenges and opportunities for today's young people, who make up more than half of the world's population. These changes have affected the way that youth communicate with and relate to others, how they perceive and engage with their governments, and how they organize themselves to shape the world around them.

With financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), NDI completed a study of youth participation programs and trends in youth political activism and leadership to guide future program decisions. The study involved a review of contemporary youth development literature produced by policy makers, practitioners, and academics, taking stock of NDI's first-hand experience working with youth, and workshopping theories of change with other democracy and governance practitioners. NDI also spoke directly with young political leaders and activists about the challenges and opportunities they face and the assistance they need. This included discussions at a NED-hosted gathering in Tanzania with more than 60 young, politically active women and men from across Africa, as well as an NDI-hosted workshop in Guatemala with 12 young Latin Americans from six countries.



Young Latin American political activists and leaders discuss youth political participation assistance at NDI workshop in Guatemala

As a result of the study, NDI developed this resource to offer guidance on how to assist young women and men in becoming more politically organized and active. The resource is divided into four main sections. The Context of Youth Development and Political Participation section includes information on the **imperative of youth development and participation** [2], **contemporary patterns of youth political activism** [3], and **how “youth” can be defined** [4]. The Unified Theory of Change for Youth Political Participation Programs section **introduces and unpacks a unified theory of change** [5] for how youth political participation can be strengthened. The Lessons for Structuring Youth Political Participation Programs section lays out guidance for planning and implementing programs that build **youth agency** [6] and an **enabling environment** [7] for youth participation, reflecting the unified theory. The Lessons from the Field section features reviews of NDI youth programs in **Kosovo** [8] and **Jordan** [9], describing how they have contributed to the different elements of the unified theory of change. Finally, the site includes information on the **Change My Community** [10] tool box, which provides practical guidance for young people to lead local-level advocacy campaigns.



Young African leaders at NED Tanzania event discuss the challenges they face as young leaders

Agency: The willingness, confidence and ability to take action, and belief that one's action matters and can have a meaningful impact.

Assets: Various types of knowledge, technical skills, soft skills and practical political know-how.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Resolution on Youth Participation in Democracy: [12] A resolution passed in April 2010 by the IPU to highlight the importance of giving young people a political voice and to promote their knowledge and participation in democratic political activities.

Positive Youth Development (PYD): A philosophy and approach to youth development that emphasizes engaging youth along with their families, communities and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems (YouthPower Learning).

Political Entry Points: Opportunities at the local, national or international level for citizens and CSOs to meaningfully begin expressing their political voice. Examples of entry points may include elections, law making and budgeting processes, and government obligations to international agreements.

Power Holder: A person or group of people in a position of control or authority.

Soft Skills: A set of behaviors, attitudes and qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, and deal with challenges and setbacks. These skills include self-efficacy, self-control, higher order thinking (problem solving, critical thinking, decision making), social skills (or interpersonal skills), communication (including conflict resolution and negotiation), empathy and goal orientation, among others.

Supportive Environment: Within the context of political participation, refers to the political avenues and opportunities that encourage young people to express themselves, engage with power holders and demonstrate their competence.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250: [13] A resolution passed in December 2015 calling for the participation and views of youth in decision making, particularly during the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.

The Context - Youth Development and Political Participation [14]

The Imperative of Youth Development and Participation

There are 3.5 billion people under the age of 30 living in the world today, comprising the largest young population in history. Ninety percent of youth live in developing countries. This unprecedentedly large generation makes up more than half of the global population, and more than 70 percent of the population in many countries where NDI works.

Today's youth are disproportionately affected by some of the world's toughest development challenges, including unemployment, environmental degradation, violent conflict, poor physical, social and emotional health, insufficient access to education, and displacement. Young women are often further disadvantaged in many of these areas due to discriminatory sociocultural norms that do not afford them the same rights as men and prevent their full participation in public space. Different youth have varying development opportunities and challenges based on individual characteristics, including disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, and other identities and circumstances that affect their lived experiences.

Despite these challenges associated with the oft-cited "youth bulge", today's youth represent a critical

opportunity for global development and progress. Young people can contribute unique aspirations, energy, and ideas to develop more stable, democratic and prosperous societies. The vitality of youth participation is recognized in multiple international agreements, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Resolution on Youth Participation in Democracy. If diverse youth are enriched with education, health, employment and civic and political engagement opportunities, they can be a demographic dividend that accelerates development across all sectors. If young people are not recognized as trusted agents of change and do not receive proper support, there is a risk that they will become disaffected and apathetic, which would harm potential gains from other development investments. Therefore, in order for youth to fulfill their potential and jumpstart global development, governments and political leaders need to engage young women and men purposefully and meaningfully as partners so they can invest their creativity, ideas and aspirations into building more prosperous futures for themselves, their societies and their nations.

This imperative is recognized by positive youth development (PYD), which is a philosophy and approach to youth development that has been used in the United States for more than 20 years and is increasingly being applied internationally. PYD recognizes the value that youth can bring to development, and therefore engages them as partners rather than recipients of aid. PYD approaches focus on empowering youth with the proper support at the individual, community and national levels, including skills, competencies, and healthy relationships and environments, that allow them to reach their full potential.

Changing Tide of Youth Activism and Leadership

NDI has found young women and men eager to get involved in public decisions to improve the welfare of their societies. Despite these ambitions, they often struggle against barriers, including sociocultural norms and institutional practices, that prevent them from influencing mainstream politics and decision making. Entrenched political elites are often reluctant to share power with youth, whom they may see as inexperienced, apathetic, unable to lead or a threat to their own power. Young women are commonly perceived as further incapable of political participation due to discriminatory gender norms. Although some political leaders visibly include young women and men, by offering them limited representation within political organizations and institutions, these spaces usually fail to provide youth with sufficient meaning or influence.

As a result of these barriers, young people have few avenues or opportunities to learn about civic and political life, engage in political discourse or access circles of power. Youth are therefore discouraged from building important knowledge, skills and confidence for political activism and leadership, which hinders their willingness and ability - or agency - to take political action to shape their societies. This lack of support and agency causes many young women and men to become frustrated with formal political institutions, which they view as unrepresentative and unresponsive.

Dissatisfied with vertical political structures that



seem out of reach and out of touch, young activists are persevering and finding new ways to express their views and improve their communities. Instead of actively participating in elections, joining political parties or supporting government-sponsored initiatives, youth are turning to individualized forms of activism, such as consumer activism, protest art, volunteering or sporadic support for transnational campaigns on global issues, to more directly impact issues they care about. As a result of globalization, the rise of technology and mass media, many youth are connecting through online platforms, both locally and internationally, to discuss challenges they face and plan direct actions to address them. This has resulted in the rise of diverse local, national and international youth-led networks and movements that are loosely organized but closely tied to common interests.

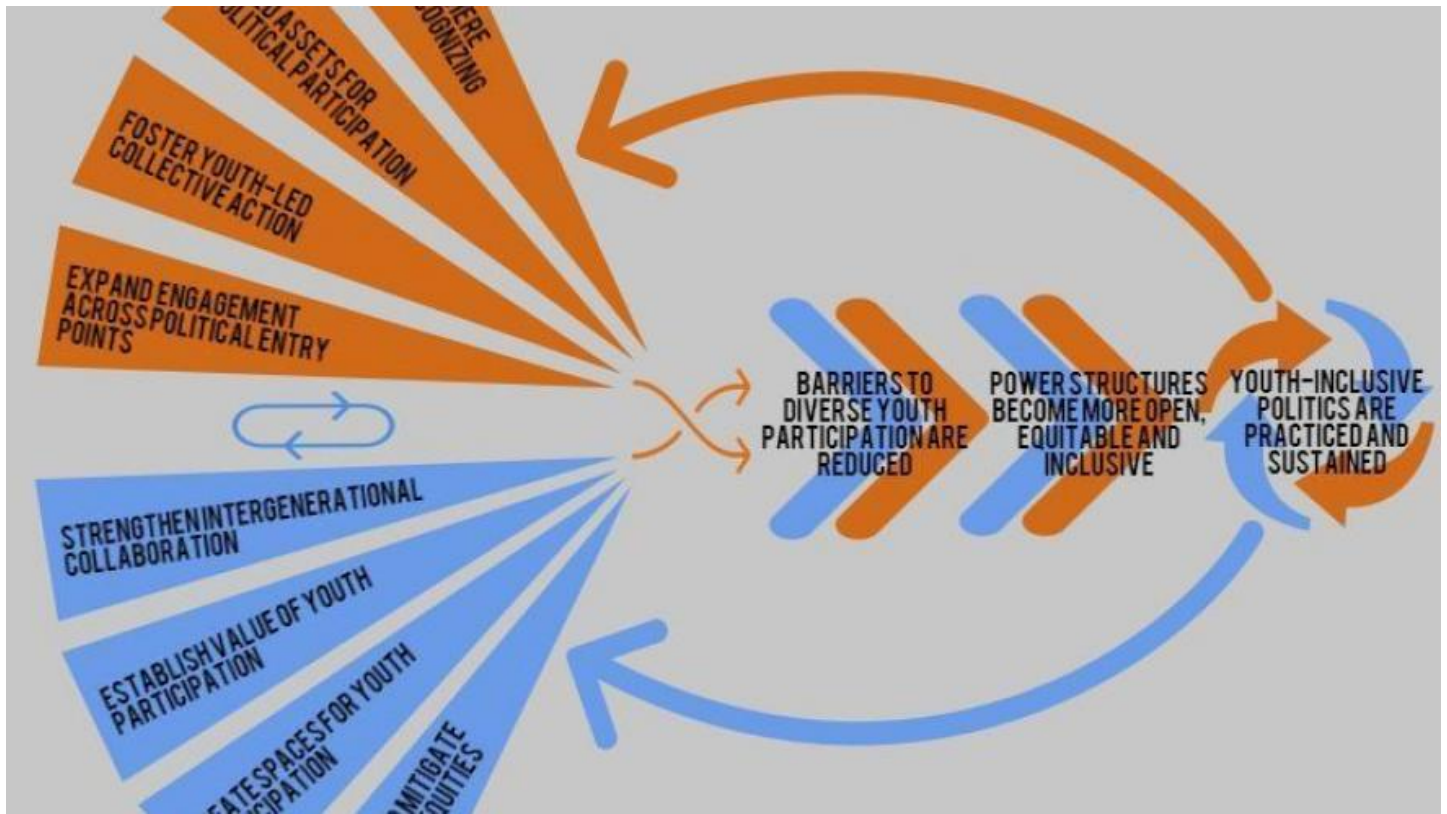
These changes are resulting in new forums for exchange, inspiration, activism and positive disruption. But they are also contributing to a growing rift between youth and formal political institutions. Today's youth need real opportunities to participate in political decision making to help drive innovation and find practical solutions to a growing and complex array of human development challenges. Providing these opportunities is necessary to foster youth belonging and citizenship to "opt in" to the state. This means that youth need the technical know-how, confidence and opportunities to effectively engage political institutions, but also that governments need to find innovative ways to improve their functioning, transparency and accountability to meet young women and men where they are and provide space for them to partner in advancing development.

Defining Youth

In international development, "youth" is defined differently based on the type of development assistance and the sociocultural context where it is delivered. Definitions of youth depend on perceptions of when someone is seen as an adult and independent from the family, which can vary significantly by context. For example, most United Nations entities define youth as young women and men between 15 and 24 years of age, but expand that range to as high as 35 depending on local definitions of youth and national policy directives. USAID targets youth between 10 and 29. Both of these agencies extend their upward age limit to 35 for political participation work, since age-related exclusion in this area usually reaches beyond 24 years and eligibility for local and national elected positions typically begins at 25 years or higher.

NDI generally works with young women and men between the ages of 18-30, but adapts this range to fit different country contexts. NDI recognizes that the diverse youth population comprises equal numbers of women and men, and includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth, youth with disabilities, ethnic and religious minority youth and other marginalized communities.

A Unified Theory of Change for Youth Political Participation Programs[5]



Recognizing that patterns of youth activism are changing, NDI partners with young people to help them use both formal and informal means of political participation to influence positive change. This helps align increased youth participation in emerging movements and issue-based initiatives (such as digital activists, community volunteers, and aspiring changemakers who are still formulating their roles), with efforts by young leaders to work within formal structures and alongside adult power holders to make their voices heard. For example, NDI is working with youth organizations and groups in Nigeria, Nicaragua, Kosovo, Jordan and many other countries to advance positive change in their communities and influence power structures.

If programs consider the circumstances, interests and motivations of youth, take into account youth diversity and the need to build their confidence (particularly for women and marginalized communities) and capacities, while assisting them to take action to reach their goals, youth can build an important sense of agency and feel empowered to make change. Concurrent efforts involving adult-led and traditional power structures to open up space for youth to engage and influence decision-making processes are equally important to encourage and allow youth to remain sustainably engaged. This process must account for the different barriers that affect the political participation of young women, LGBTI youth, youth with disabilities and other marginalized communities.

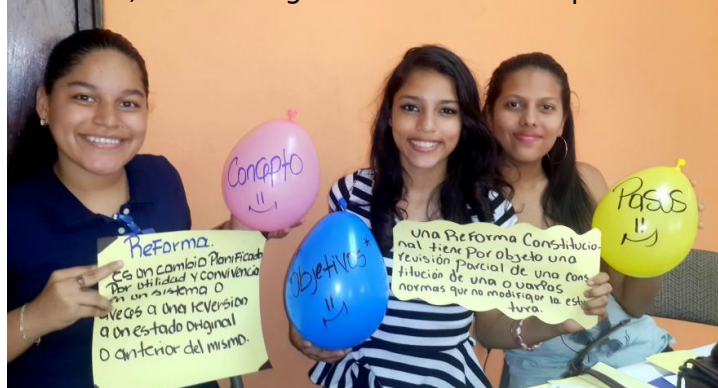
How does this change happen? NDI's study concluded that it involves an iterative, multi-faceted process that starts with an interplay between the development of youth agency and an enabling environment for active youth participation. This thinking is presented in the next section as a theory of change that unifies the various efforts required to ultimately reduce barriers to youth participation and institutionalize youth-inclusive and -responsive political practices. This theory reflects principles of positive youth development by recognizing the individual and environmental factors that affect the ability of young people to develop and fulfill their potential as agents of positive change.

The process of making politics more inclusive of young people is illustrated above in the visual depiction of a unified theory of change. The two primary components that propel this process are the development of youth agency and an enabling environment for their participation. Agency refers to the willingness and capacity of young people to act individually and collectively. Whereas, the enabling environment refers to the political avenues and opportunities that encourage young people to express themselves, interact with power holders and demonstrate their competence. Cultivation of agency and the development of an enabling environment

combine to provide young people with the starting-power required to influence political processes and outcomes through active, organized participation. In turn, systemic barriers to participation start to erode and power structures become more open and inclusive.

Unpacking the Theory

Of course, these changes take time and the process is much more complex than the illustration might suggest.



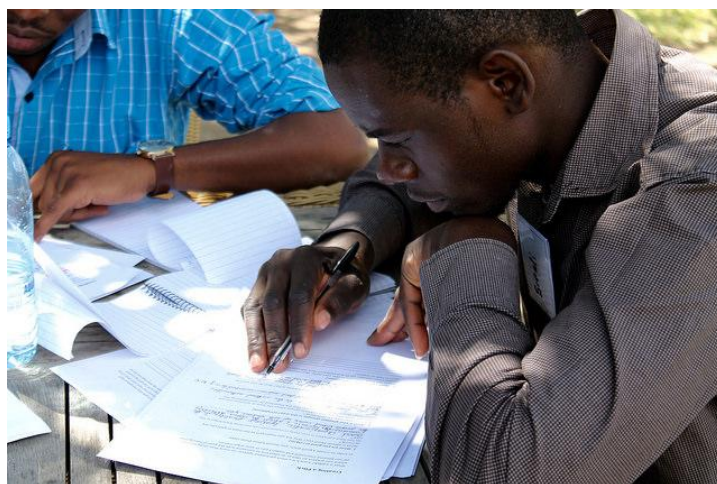
Nicaraguan youth define "reform" and "constitutional reform" during NDI-hosted "Democracy Dialogues"

The inherent political nature of this work precludes linear, mechanistic approaches in practice. It also makes it necessary to consider fundamental questions about which young people are participating, which centers of power are they challenging, and which issues and interests are they promoting. Because every context is different, additional thought needs to be given to specific political, cultural or economic circumstances so that programs can be tailored appropriately. This is particularly important when dealing with the unique barriers to participation faced by young women and other marginalized youth. However, the unified theory of change can still be used as a framework to help structure youth political participation programs,

and make initial design and delivery decisions.

The theory envisions the need for programs that address the development of both youth agency and an environment that enables their participation. This requires a mix of interventions and an underlying emphasis on the role young people themselves can play in driving change. Rather than being passive recipients of assistance, young women and men are expected to play an active role in developing their agency and promoting an environment that better enables youth participation.

In a general sense, agency refers to the willingness and capacity of young people to act individually and collectively. More specifically, agency entails a blend of knowledge, skills and attitudes that develop and are reinforced - in large part - through direct political action. This blend will look different from one context to the next, depending on a variety of factors, including the needs and interests of the youth involved. Improved agency supports a belief among youth that their action matters and can have a meaningful impact.



Youth in Zambia develop policy proposals to pitch to leaders of their parties

The recommended approach for developing the political agency of young people includes four principal elements:

- meet youth where they are, recognizing that diversity determines different starting points and needs based on identity, location, cultural and other contextual circumstances;
- build their assets through experiential forms of learning that increase knowledge, technical skills, soft skills, and practical political know-how;
- foster youth-led collective action to address self-selected issues and causes that motivate their political participation; and

- expand engagement across various political entry points so that youth are actively occupying available space and seen as playing multiple political roles.

An enabling environment refers to political avenues and opportunities that encourage young people to express themselves, engage power holders and demonstrate their competence. Most programs face situations where politics is either closed to young women and men, or there is only token support for their participation. The lack of support severely limits participation, even in situations where some amount of agency exists. To change this reality, a profoundly political strategy is required, which relies on relationship building. This involves interactions where understanding, trust, respect and appreciation can emerge, along with space for participation in policy discussions and decision making and collaboration between youth- and adult-led organizations.

The recommended approach to fostering an enabling environment includes the following elements:

- recognize and address structural inequities that disadvantage youth based on their gender and other identities;
- create spaces for youth to interact with power holders and build relationships;
- establish the value of youth participation through demonstrations of leadership and constructive engagement; and
- strengthen intergenerational relationships through collaboration.



As discussed, youth agency and the enabling environment are reinforcing. The interplay between the two can begin breaking down barriers to youth participation. Initial steps taken to develop youth agency and the enabling environment are about creating the momentum needed for longer term changes in political norms and practices.

The "Lessons for Structuring Youth Political Participation Programs" further describes the program implications of the unified theory of change, with specific examples from NDI programs.

Youth Agency [6]



Approaches to developing agency should **meet youth where they are**, recognizing different needs and interests based on identity, gender, location, culture and other contextual circumstances. Building agency also requires experiential learning opportunities that strengthen key assets for political participation, including knowledge, technical skills, and soft skills, and fostering **youth-led collective action** to address issues they care about, which helps motivate youth to participate politically. Finally, assistance should focus on **expanding youth engagement across political entry points** to occupy available space and demonstrate the interest and ability of young people to play multiple political roles.

Meet youth where they are, recognizing diversity

Youth may have different starting points and needs based on identity (gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other characteristics), location, experience and other personal circumstances. For example, different youth may have varied levels of education and political exposure, or face different social norms or logistical challenges, that affect their ability to fully engage in or benefit from an assistance program. Programs must recognize this diversity, and intentionally adapt to meet the particular needs of youth involved.

The following recommendations can be helpful for structuring a program to account for diversity:

- **Include young women and men on the program team:** Recognize young people as assets who can inject youth voice into program design, planning and management. Young team members who represent the communities involved in the program can make it more authentic, help establish trusting relationships between the program and participants, and foster a safe space that encourages their more active engagement. For example, including young women on the team is an important way to encourage the participation of young women, particularly in rural or other environments where young women may be hesitant.
- **Accommodate varying skill and experience levels:** Consider the level of skills and experience of program participants, and adapt assistance to meet their needs. If you are unsure, asking youth about their needs and interests can be the best way to determine how to plan and deliver a beneficial program. If the youth you are targeting have widely varying skill levels, they may benefit from separate program tracks.

- Plan around sociocultural and logistical factors: Recognize and take into account how sociocultural, institutional and logistical barriers and factors can affect the ability of different youth to engage in and benefit from a program. For example, if you plan to work with young women in a mixed gender setting, it is important to consider how cultural norms may prevent women from feeling confident or comfortable engaging fully and equally with men in the program. In addition, it may be necessary to hold program activities in the evenings or on weekends to encourage more youth involvement.

Strengthen assets for political participation

Learning to participate politically takes practice and the development of assets that support organizing and activism. Assets can include: knowledge of democratic principles, processes and government structures; technical organizing skills; and “soft skills” that guide personal interactions and judgements.

Although the needs and interests of the young people will determine the specific array of assets a given program should aim to develop, the following recommendations provide initial guidance on how to approach this work:

- Use experiential learning: Youth respond particularly well when given the chance to learn from real-world experience where knowledge and skills can be applied, with guidance and mentorship. Although some level of training or classroom learning will likely be necessary at the outset, the most concrete way to help young people develop political know-how is through taking action, learning lessons, reflecting on the experiences and adjusting each step of the way. Relatedly, any classroom learning should be interactive by encouraging youth to engage with one another and critically explore the subject matter
- Provide practical knowledge and skills: Although the theoretical underpinnings of democracy and civil society might be of interest to some youth, a focus on providing knowledge and skills that can be readily used in the local context is probably more practical. Otherwise, improving theoretical knowledge can become disconnected from the experiential part of the agency-development approach. This does not preclude the introduction of a general set of tools, for things like understanding the local political system and power dynamics, but those tools need to be appropriate for what is politically possible, practical, and in line with the type of activism the young people are considering. In some cases, knowledge and skills might relate to policy advocacy, monitoring a political process, raising awareness about an issue, conducting research and producing policy briefs, or running for office. For each one of these types of activism, specific knowledge and skills are required, ranging from policy analysis, to strategic planning, to message development.
- Be purposeful about soft skills building: NDI’s study found that abilities which are not directly tied to any one type of action or endeavor, but are more related to how young people approach opportunities and challenges, are equally important for sustained political participation and leadership. These abilities, which are often referred to as “soft skills”, include self-efficacy, self-control, higher order thinking (problem

Answering the following questions can help inform approaches to building agency that account for youth diversity.

- What motivates young women and men in the target context to engage in politics. What issues do they care about?
- What is the experience and skills level of the youth you intend to work with?
- Is it possible and/or appropriate in the local context for young women and men from diverse communities and groups to work together to take collective action? If not, is it more appropriate to work with different groups separately?
- What is the current experience, education and skill level of the youth you plan to work with? Do they need more basic skills building, or can the program start with more advanced content?
- How do socio cultural norms affect the ability of diverse youth to employ newly learned skills, knowledge and abilities, including technical and “soft” skills?
- Are there logistical considerations that need to be accounted for? Are program activities located in a space that is safe for all participants, including young women and other marginalized communities? Are they taking place at a time that is convenient for diverse youth, given other commitments such as school or child care?
- Are different entry points accessible for young women and youth from other marginalized groups? What might you need to do enable different youth to engage various spaces?

solving, critical thinking, decision making), social skills (or interpersonal skills), communication (including conflict resolution and negotiation), empathy, and goal orientation. These skills enable young people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, and deal with challenges and setbacks. They cannot be learned over the course of a single training or workshop, but are established over time through habit-forming practices. Both young women and men have reported building these skills through a variety of NDI program activities, including facilitated classroom interaction and discussion with peers, as well as the planning and practice of political organizing.

It is useful to bear in mind how the distinction between hard and soft skills relates with socially constructed gender norms. In many contexts, soft skills are associated with women and are perceived to be feminine traits, whereas “hard” or technical skills are associated with men and perceived to be more masculine in nature. Such norms can therefore impact the way soft skills are developed, perceived, received, and utilized by women and men in programming. For more information on how NDI programs build soft skills, see [NDI's Civic Update](#) [15] on this topic.

Foster youth-led collective action

Young women and men will have their own motivations for wanting to participate politically. NDI learned that when young people are able to identify issues and causes that they care about, and then are assisted in taking action, they are more likely to remain motivated and politically active. This result can be amplified when the action is taken collectively, by groups of young women and men, or groups that comprise the young and old working together on a cross-cutting community concern. Opportunities to develop, join and lead networks and groups for political action is especially important for young women, who often lack access to the same networks as men (even young men). In many cases, it is important to also support young women in building a women's network to support one another, and connect with other women who are politically engaged. This should be done alongside efforts to involve young women in existing network-building efforts with young men.

NDI has identified the following lessons for supporting youth-led collective action:

- Support incremental action toward self-selected goals: Youth may enter a program with ambitious goals, such as improving youth representation in the legislature or eradicating unemployment. Although it is important to allow youth to pursue their own interests, it is also necessary to manage their expectations of the time and effort that will likely be required to accomplish different types of goals. It may be useful for youth to start with smaller, single issue actions or campaigns at the local level (in a neighborhood,

Social Media for Advocacy in Kosovo



Through NDI's New Media School in Kosovo, young women and men receive guided support in conducting advocacy campaigns using social media communication tools. While social media is a focal point of the program, participants learn how these tools can support their broader advocacy efforts. Interviews with participants have shown that youth find immense value in many other technical skills they learn through the program, including skills related to the process of policy advocacy, analyzing and developing policy, public speaking and interfacing with traditional media like television, radio and print journalists.

village, town or city), such as service delivery issues, which may be more likely to yield tangible results in a shorter period of time. Achieving some level of immediate influence or change in their community builds youth confidence and encourages continued action. As youth build their experience, skills and confidence, they will be better equipped to gradually take on larger scale and more complex efforts, such as national campaigns.

- Introduce techniques that appeal to youth: Youth respond well to political techniques that align with their existing interests and communication habits. It can therefore be useful to introduce youth to skill sets and tactics involving online tools and art, such as social media communication skills. In addition to appealing to youth who use them, these techniques can help them engage and gain support from more young people in their communities.
- Gain feedback and adjust: Young women and men should be able to influence the direction of the program. As a program progresses and youth continue to learn, they may home in on specific skill sets they need to build to reach their goals. To ensure that a program continues to meet participants' evolving interests and needs, staff should regularly gather feedback on participants' experiences and what additional or different activities may deepen the value of the program. This feedback can be collected through evaluation surveys and informal conversations. It is also important for the program team to monitor how youth are progressing across different indicators, such as asset building, to ensure that the program is equipping youth with the assistance they need.
- Seek opportunities to provide youth with long-term assistance: As described in the "assets" section, developing political know-how and confidence is best done through guided practice over time. Although funding opportunities may not support multi-year programs, young people benefit from continued assistance over a longer period of time. NDI has seen that programs that provide ongoing mentorship and support to participants over several years, either through one program or multiple, shorter initiatives, have more often resulted in sustained political participation. If this is not

Supporting youth-led action in Kosovo

NDI has supported youth-led campaigns in Kosovo to address a wide range of issues, from preservation of historical sites, to improving gender equality. Campaigns addressing local-level issues have been more likely to achieve tangible outcomes, including the establishment of animal shelters for stray dogs and cycling lanes on city streets. Achieving success in their campaigns boosted the confidence of youth involved and encouraged their continued activism.

Learning and Adapting Program Approaches

Through the Usharek+ program in Jordan, staff gain feedback, both verbally and through evaluation forms, from youth after every program activity and use it to inform changes to the program design and curriculum. The staff, who are young women and men themselves, also participate in an annual retreat where they reflect on program successes and challenges, and discuss areas for improvement. Learning from these activities has resulted in changes to the program to better meet the needs of participants. For example, in 2016, NDI added a learning component to assist youth in using digital storytelling as a tool in their campaigns.

Long-Term Support in Kosovo

NDI has provided support to young activists and leaders in Kosovo through multiple projects over more than 10 years. Although many projects have been as short as one or two years, NDI has found opportunities to continue to provide continued assistance to active and committed youth over multiple years. Participants have credited this ongoing support and mentorship as crucial to developing their skills, confidence and motivation to remain politically engaged.

possible, it can be helpful to connect youth with external opportunities and programs where they can continue to access guidance and advice, gain new experiences and skill sets, and become more confident.

Expand youth participation across political entry points

Democratic politics follows a perpetual cycle involving various institutions and actors, purposes and processes, and competing priorities and policy agendas. At the same time, there may be political cycles that transpire

regularly at local, regional and national levels of government. Therefore, helping young women and men participate in politics does not have to be tied to a singular event or moment in time, since many different potential entry points may exist. Moreover, the ability of young people to advance a political issue or cause will normally require working across entry points to develop the necessary power and influence. An election, for instance, might present an entry point for individual and collective action that can set the stage for follow-up efforts aimed at engaging elected officials. This approach allows youth to strengthen a variety of skill sets and gain different experiences, while accessing and occupying different political spaces. This shows that youth are active and interested in politics, and able to play a range of constructive roles.

NDI's study identified the following recommendations for expanding youth participation across entry points:

- Promote the use of campaign-organizing approaches: A campaign is an effective way to structure political action toward a particular goal. This approach provides a framework for establishing objectives, identifying targets, allies and opponents, identifying political entry points and planning actions. For a better understanding of how to design and implement a grassroots campaign, you can refer to the Change My Community tool box.
- Facilitate strategic political/power analysis to identify entry points: Effective campaign strategies must take into account what political processes are taking place and who has authority over a given issue. Conducting analysis of where power lies and how to influence power dynamics is important for identifying the entry points to address a particular issue.
- Introduce different actions: Assist youth in using a variety of actions and tactics to reach their goals. Actions may include contacting elected officials, organizing and participating in town hall or community meetings, circulating petitions, conducting research, and monitoring political processes.

When attempting to take advantage of a politically viable entry point, there are a number of questions to consider:

- What political processes are taking place (e.g., elections, budget making, constitutional reform, development planning)?
- What issues are dominating the political agenda (e.g., EU accession, extractive industry oversight)?
- What issues do citizens care most about (e.g., public health, water and sanitation, education)?
- Are there existing mechanisms for citizen input (e.g., town hall meetings, constituency dialogues, public hearings)?
- What are government's commitments and obligations (e.g., ratified Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Open Government Partnership member)?
- Who are champions in government when it comes to citizen engagement (e.g., certain ministries or parliamentary committee might be more open to citizen engagement)?

Expanding Participation through Usharek+

Through its Usharek+ program in Jordan, NDI has identified opportunities for Jordanian youth to take advantage of multiple entry points to the political process. During the 2015 elections, NDI connected Usharek+ participants with opportunities to observe electoral processes, work on candidate campaigns, educate voters, and press candidates to prioritize policy issues of importance to their potential constituents. This provided Usharek+ youth with new experiences and skills while building their awareness of different political entry points.



Approaches to developing an enabling environment for youth political participation must recognize and address structural inequities that may limit the ability of youth to occupy and expand different political spaces based on gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or other individual or group characteristics. Fostering an enabling environment also requires identifying or creating space for youth to interact and build relationships with power holders, as well as working with youth and power holders to establish the value of youth participation. These interactions can lead to opportunities to strengthen intergenerational collaboration.

Recognize and address structural inequities

Structural inequities can affect how different young people take advantage of assistance programs, publically express their views and interests, or access political processes, because of their identity (gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other characteristics), location and other circumstances. Cultural perceptions of young women and LGBTI youth, for example, may prevent them from occupying the same political spaces as others, and there may be a risk of backlash or harm if they raise their profiles and visibilities in a way that is seen as inappropriate in the local context.

The following recommendations can help ensure more inclusive programs that account for youth diversity and model an enabling environment:

- **Consider sociocultural and institutional barriers:** Think about whether it is culturally sensitive for different young people to engage with power holders in the local context, and plan accordingly. For example, if it would be seen as culturally offensive or inappropriate for young women, a mixed gender group, or other marginalized youth to engage with a particular power holder or in a specific public space, consider how a more culturally sensitive arrangement can be made. Although political action and contact with other people is a fundamental way to break down sociocultural barriers to the participation of marginalized

youth, it is important to act with caution to avoid overly negative experiences or risk traumatic backlash that could cause harm or discourage further youth participation.

- **Set up youth for success:** Related to the above point, a lack of responsiveness from power holders can cause youth to become frustrated and disengage from politics. Although this is not in the direct control of a program implementer, it is important to mitigate these risks by seeking to support youth engagement through an avenue that exhibits a greater chance of responsiveness and accountability. This is particularly important for youth who have less experience in politics, and those from marginalized communities. This risk can also be mitigated by intentional discussions with youth to manage their expectations, describing the long-term nature of political change and highlighting success stories from local and international contexts.
- **Identify commitments for youth inclusion:** Work with youth to explore any current efforts or commitments to reach out to youth or include them in political processes. This could include national policies or laws governing youth participation in politics and public life, or commitments to international agreements such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security. These commitments may provide entry points for youth to take action or advocate for government accountability in following through with these promises. Similar commitments regarding the empowerment of women or other marginalized groups may serve as an entry point for youth from those demographics.

Create space for youth to interact with power holders and build relationships

A critical step toward building an enabling environment for youth participation is to help young women and men build relationships with power holders. In order for youth to develop these relationships, it is often necessary to create spaces for youth to come into contact with power holders through such activities as one-on-one meetings or public events. It is important to understand power dynamics and inequities that will affect the ability of diverse youth to occupy these spaces.

The following questions can help inform approaches to building a supportive environment that accounts for youth diversity:

- How are youth perceived differently based on gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics? How does this change for young people who face a “double discrimination” (being both young and identifying as a woman or with another marginalized community)?
- What is the current level of political leadership and representation for the youth you intend to work with? How do these youth organize around issues that affect them?
- Taking into account the perceptions of and barriers facing the youth you intend to work with, could they risk becoming a target for violence or other backlash if they heighten their visibility and challenge existing power structures? How does this differ for youth from other marginalized communities?
- In the target context, is it acceptable for young women and men you are supporting to speak to or challenge an elder or elected official?
- What, if any, efforts are government and power holders making to better include young women and men in political decisionmaking? What about youth from other marginalized communities?
- What national policies, laws or constitutional provisions exist that affect youth leadership and political participation?
- Has the target country committed to any of the following international treaties or agreements?
 - UNSC 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (2015)
 - Inter-Parliamentary Union Resolution on Youth Participation in the Democratic Process (2010)
- If it is not possible to create ample political space for the youth you intend to work with to participate in politics, is there a risk of perpetuating frustration and disengagement? Consider how the program can be designed to mitigate these risks.

For example, when working in patriarchal contexts where public leaders are overwhelmingly male, it is necessary to consider whether it is acceptable for young women to approach or challenge a male figure. NDI identified the following recommendations for how to create and structure these interactions:

- **Place youth in front:** In spaces with power holders, it is important for youth to take an active leadership role to avoid being overshadowed by elders in the room. This is an important first step for youth to demonstrate their competence. For example, if NDI assists youth in organizing a meeting with power holders as part of a campaign, NDI should prepare youth to lead the meeting by introducing the goals of their campaign, discussing the issue at hand, and making an ask, where appropriate.
- **Promote constructive approaches:** NDI has seen that it is important for youth to take a constructive approach when engaging political leaders, by seeking their partnership in achieving a mutually beneficial goal. When leaders feel as if youth are accusing them of not adequately fulfilling their responsibilities or being ignorant of public problems, they are less likely to respond positively and take the requested action. When youth have taken a constructive, solutions-oriented approach where they express a desire to partner with power holders to address a public issue, leadership has been more supportive. It can also be beneficial for youth to describe how a particular issue is important to the welfare of their broader community, beyond issues often associated with youth, such as education or recreational issues.

Roundtables with Youth and Power Holders in Kosovo

To support the efforts of youth-led advocacy campaigns in Kosovo, NDI has often organized roundtable events for youth to discuss issues with local and national level political and government leaders. These events have provided a space for young people to constructively voice their concerns regarding a particular issue, and propose policy solutions. This has enabled youth to establish initial contact and relationships with power holders, which have often paved the way to future interactions and collaboration. It is important to note that NDI has been able to create this space due to its strong relationships with political leaders in Kosovo.

Establish the value of youth participation

As youth develop their agency and repeatedly interact with power holders, they can demonstrate their competence and establish value among power holders for youth participation. Value for youth participation is typically established when power holders see that young people have positive intentions, are capable of understanding complex political issues and processes, and have particular assets or ideas that can make a positive contribution to society or to a particular political organization. Establishing and building this value among power holders is critical for practices of youth participation and inclusion to change. Achieving this change takes time, and can be difficult depending on the political and cultural context. It also depends on which youth are involved, as leaders may be more or less receptive to young women or other marginalized youth.

NDI's study identified the following recommendations for approaches to building value for youth participation:

- **Prioritize youth-led interactions:** The most impactful way to build value among power holders for youth participation is to provide opportunities for youth to interact with them and demonstrate their competence, as described above. This should be seen as the center of any program approach to improving how youth are perceived as activists and leaders in politics and public life.
- **Where appropriate, make the case for youth participation:** In contexts where a program implementer has relationships of trust with power holders, it can be helpful and appropriate to supplement youth-led work with separate efforts to demonstrate to power holders why youth participation is beneficial and provide

assistance for how to better include young people. For example, in many places, NDI shares public opinion research with political party leaders demonstrating young people's policy interests and perceptions of political parties. This can encourage leaders to better reach out to youth and work with them to shape more responsive policy positions, particularly in contexts where youth make up a significant proportion of the voting population. It is important for political leaders to understand that meaningful youth inclusion does not mean only using youth to do ground work during election periods, such as going door to door to gain votes, but also requires providing young people with meaningful input into party policy.

Strengthen intergenerational collaboration

Building on established intergenerational relationships and some level of value for youth participation, continued collaboration can provide more opportunities for youth to contribute to policy discussions and share decision making power. This collaboration also strengthens relationships by establishing mutual understanding, trust and respect. Over time, this can contribute to developing norms of greater openness and inclusion of young people.

NDI's study revealed the following lessons about leveraging and strengthening intergenerational relationships and collaboration:

- Support collaboration toward common interests: A shared issue of interest between youth and power holders can serve as an opportunity for collaboration. Identifying issues of common interest between youth and power holders can therefore be a key element of program strategies for youth programs.
- Seek and engage mentors for youth: In addition to providing openings for meaningful youth political influence, power holders who value youth participation can serve as mentors for young activists and aspiring leaders. These mentors can help advise youth on political strategies, and provide inspiration and encouragement for youth to continue their involvement in

Kosovar Youth Establish Value for their Participation

With support from NDI, youth-led advocacy campaigns in Kosovo have achieved favorable outcomes for single mothers, environmental causes, preservation of historical sites, and others. In many cases, political party and elected leaders have taken notice of the efforts of these youth and opened space for them to take on more meaningful positions within parties and government. In addition, many participants in NDI's New Media School have been given ownership of communication responsibilities within their parties and during election campaigns due to their unique skills in social media communications.

Making the Case for Youth Inclusion in Kosovo

NDI often shares public opinion research with Kosovar political party leaders showing how young people perceive their party and the issues they prioritize. In many cases, this has encouraged parties to create more prominent roles for young people and adopt policy positions to address their interests.

Intergenerational Collaboration through Usharek+

Through NDI's Usharek+ program in Jordan, issues of common interest between youth and parliamentarians have provided a means for intergenerational collaboration. For example, a group of MPs have become supporters for a youth-led campaign to improve youth representation in parliament and led discussions on this issue in parliament. In addition, as a result of efforts by a group of students at a polytechnic university to improve reporting of domestic violence incidents, parliamentary committees have been cooperating with campaign participants to find a legislative solution.

politics. Mentors can be particularly impactful if they are young themselves or otherwise reflect the identities of the youth in the program. For example, young women may feel more confident about their work if they see and engage with women leaders.

- Engage the next generation: It is important to recognize that youth is a temporary stage in life. In order for norms and practices of youth political participation to change in the long term, today's young adults must be succeeded by a new politically active and engaged youth generation. To support the participation of the next generation, it can be valuable for programs to encourage youth to engage younger members of their communities in their activism. Further, if youth in a program advance within their organizations and parties or to elected leadership positions, it is useful to continue to involve them in programs as supporters of future youth-led activism and leadership.

Leveraging Youth Relationships in Kosovo's Political Institutions

Many youth involved in NDI's Kosovo programs have advanced to local- and national- level leadership positions. In many cases, these leaders' have helped provide avenues for other young people to take part in political processes. They also serve as mentors and positive inspiration for youth to continue their political activism. This has been particularly important for Serbs and ethnic minority youth in Northern Kosovo, most of whom are more marginalized and disadvantaged than other communities.

Introduction - Selection of program cases [16]



To better demonstrate how the unified theory of change can be operationalized within a program, NDI sought identified examples of effective NDI youth programs that have contributed to the theory's various elements. Based on an analysis of current and recent youth programs across all global regions, NDI's staff working group on youth programming selected NDI programs in Kosovo and Jordan to be studied. After completing an in-

country examination of these programs, NDI developed reports, included in this section, describing how they exemplify program approaches to building agency and an enabling environment for youth participation.

Kosovo

Since 2008, NDI has implemented a series of programs in Kosovo to strengthen youth political participation. Program monitoring and evaluation concluded that the programs have helped change the level and frequency of youth participation, due in part to increases in youth agency and an enabling environment for their participation. In February 2017, NDI conducted a substantive, field-based study of this work to gain a better understanding of how it has evolved and achieved results. The study uncovered several lessons and related program features that explain the process of simultaneously developing agency and an enabling environment, and how the two dimensions combine to help drive sustained youth participation.



[8]

Jordan

Since 2012, NDI has implemented a two-phased program in partnership with 28 Jordanian universities to strengthen youth political participation. Standard monitoring and evaluation suggest the program has resulted in improved levels and frequency of political participation among youth involved, due in part to increases in youth agency and gradual progress in the development of an enabling environment for their participation. In February 2017, NDI conducted a substantive review of the program to gain a better understanding of how it has achieved these results. The study uncovered several lessons and related program features that explain the process of simultaneously developing agency and an enabling environment, and how the two dimensions combine to help drive sustained youth participation.



[9]

Lessons from Kosovo [8]



Students in Zvecan, Kosovo, brainstorm ways to stop school bullying, as part of a community initiative started by youth leadership program participants.

Overview:

Since 2008, NDI has implemented a series of programs in Kosovo to strengthen the political participation of young women and men. The program monitoring and evaluation associated with these efforts concluded that the programs have helped change the level and frequency of youth participation. In part, this can be attributed to increases in youth agency and an enabling environment to support their active, meaningful engagement, which aligns with NDI's unified theory of change for youth political participation programs. In February 2017, NDI conducted a substantive, field-based study of this work to gain a better understanding of how it has evolved and achieved results. The study uncovered several lessons and related program features that explain the process of simultaneously developing agency and an enabling environment, and how the two dimensions combine to help drive sustained youth participation.

Study Methodology:

To conduct the study, NDI's DC-based Program Officer for Youth Participation traveled to Kosovo and held semi-structured interviews with seven NDI staff who manage and implement youth programs, 29 current and former participants (including 13 young women and 16 young men), and two representatives of partner organizations involved in NDI's work. Through the interviews, the program officer gathered information on how NDI involved youth in the design, management and evaluation of programs. The program officer also explored the experiences of youth in the programs, including their motivations for joining, whether and how it has affected their ability to meaningfully participate in political processes, and perceptions of the value of NDI's work and how it has influenced practices of youth political participation in Kosovo.

Description of Kosovo Youth Programs:

Since declaring independence in 2008, Kosovo has struggled with a range of social, political and economic challenges, including government corruption, unemployment, poverty, and limited and unequal education

opportunities. Young women and men under 30, who make up more than half of the country's population, are disproportionately affected by many of these issues; nearly 70 per cent of youth are unemployed, and many lack access to education. The country's minority ethnic Serb communities - and youth from those communities, in particular - face deeper challenges, including those related to the settlement of Kosovo's status with Serbia, which impede the delivery of services necessary to support their growth and development.

Despite these challenges, young people have the potential to spearhead positive change. NDI public opinion research over the past several years has shown that young people under 30 are the most vested in building opportunities for a peaceful and prosperous future, and are more optimistic about Kosovo's future than older generations. While many youth are eager to become involved in political efforts to improve the welfare of their communities and society, they struggle to effectively organize themselves, gain the respect of elders and attain meaningful roles in political decision making. These struggles result from sociocultural and institutional barriers to youth political participation, including stereotypes that youth are lazy, apathetic and incompetent, and the lack of meaningful opportunities for youth to learn about or get involved in civic and political life. Ethnic Serb and other minority youth are particularly marginalized and lack community support for participation in political processes relative to the majority ethnic Albanian population.

NDI has worked with diverse young women and men since 2008 to become more politically organized and active and to channel their energy, ideas and aspirations into political processes. Through a series of programs, an approach built on issue-based organizing and direct action has emerged as an effective means for engaging youth in Kosovo and improving their political participation. Each of these programs is briefly described below.

Through the New Media School, NDI has assisted young activists and leaders in carrying out advocacy campaigns using social media communication tools. Through three cohorts of the program, 60 young women and men who are active in political parties and civil society organizations have worked together to lead campaigns addressing a variety of local- and national-level issues, from preservation of historical sites to improving treatment of stray dogs to increasing gender equality in local and national assemblies.

NDI's inter-ethnic advocacy and leadership programs have provided a forum for ethnic Serb and Albanian youth to build cross-ethnic relationships, political leadership and advocacy skills and experience taking political action toward common goals, contributing to a politically active and skilled generation that is more willing and able to collaborate across ethnic lines. This work has taken place in different communities around the country, with a focus on the northern Serb-majority and ethnically mixed municipalities, which have historically been a flashpoint for inter-ethnic conflict. Through these programs, hundreds of young ethnically diverse women and men have collaborated on campaigns addressing shared interests, including the environment, traffic safety, sexual and reproductive health, and government transparency and accountability.

Through the Youth Leadership Program (YLP), NDI has worked separately with ethnic Serb youth to connect over unique issues in their communities, better understand how to navigate local decision making processes, and engage other citizens and local elected leaders to build norms of government accountability, responsiveness and citizen participation. During elections held in 2010 and 2013, NDI provided assistance to ethnic Serb and other minority youth to campaign



As part of a campaign, an inter-ethnic group of youth organized a day of "basketball against violence" to bring community members together

for public office, 15 of whom were elected to local and national positions.

NDI's annual Week of Women (WoW) and Women's Leadership Academy (WLA) have brought together Kosovar women from political parties, civil society, business, the media and academia every year since 2012 to build networks and develop skills to become more effective leaders in their fields. Although WoW consists of a week of learning and networking opportunities for women from different fields, WLA has engaged small groups of the most committed WoW participants each year in an intensive training program to hone political leadership skills and implement advocacy campaigns. Many young women have participated in WoW and WLA each year, including participants from other NDI youth programs described above, as an opportunity to build networks of mutual support with their peers. WLA participants have led campaigns on a variety of issues, from improving regulation of public schools to gender equality in inheritance and property rights.



Discussions during Week of Women

Analysis through the Unified Theory of Change

This section summarizes how NDI's work in Kosovo exemplifies ways to address the different elements within the theory of change in order to shape new political practices surrounding youth participation. The descriptions are supplemented with feature boxes containing quotes from interviews conducted during this study, as well as supporting examples from NDI's programs.

Youth Agency

As a result of NDI's assistance, diverse young people have reported and demonstrated improved willingness and ability to participate in politics - or agency - both individually and collectively. These changes in agency can be

attributed to strengthened assets through interactive learning and experience taking collective political action.

"As a result of NDI's program, I developed the confidence that, despite my young age, I can have a role in politics." -NDI program beneficiary

NDI has tailored its programs to meet youth where they are, recognizing their different needs and starting points based on levels of experience, ethnicity, gender and location. The inter-ethnic programs have provided an opportunity for young people - many of whom have never met someone from another ethnic community - to build cross-ethnic relationships and understanding. For ethnic minority youth who are not comfortable working in a multi-ethnic program, the YLP has provided a forum to build basic political skills and confidence while working in communities that may be inaccessible or dangerous for youth from other ethnic groups. Similarly, most of NDI's programs are mixed gender, but WoW and WLA have provided separate opportunities for women to build networks, skills and experience separately from young men.

Young women and men have played a central role on the program team, contributing to all aspects of program design, planning, management and evaluation. Young team members have helped ensure that the program meets the needs of young people and have been key for establishing trusting relationships between the program and participants. The team often gathers feedback on the program from young participants and adjusts the curriculum and program delivery practices to respond to youth needs and interests. During the study of this program, young women reported that seeing young women NDI staff members encouraged them

to join and fully engage in the program. Ethnic Serb participants also reported that seeing staff members from their ethnic community on NDI's program team encouraged their participation. NDI has set out and enforced ground rules during activities to ensure respectful communication and interaction between young women and men, and different ethnic groups. In inter-ethnic settings, NDI has provided interpretation between Albanian and Serbian so that all youth could participate equally.

Through NDI's programs, Kosovar youth have **strengthened assets** that have contributed to their more effective and sustained participation in politics, including knowledge, technical skills, and "soft skills". In discussions with NDI, youth reported gaining a better understanding of democracy, political processes, and the structure of Kosovo's government. They also described that learning skills related to policy advocacy, conducting research, policy debates, and media communication (including online and traditional media), among others, have continued to be particularly useful in their political activism outside of NDI's programs. Participants also said that the experience of learning, engaging with peers and taking political action built their soft skills, including an improved sense of self-efficacy, critical thinking abilities, goal orientation, and interpersonal skills. Youth in inter-ethnic programs reported building empathy for other ethnic communities, which is consistent with post-program surveys that have signaled improved understanding between youth from different ethnic groups.



Kosovo youth learn about social media communications techniques

Although some of the practical skills and knowledge have been initially introduced through classroom workshops, participants report that they further practiced and internalized these abilities through **collective political action**. Learning-by-doing has been the methodological approach of these programs. NDI has worked with youth to discuss and select issues or causes they view as priorities at local and national levels, and then supported them in forming groups, including inter-ethnic and mixed gender groups, to execute campaigns to address the self-selected issues. During interviews with NDI, youth described being motivated by the opportunity to take action to directly affect change on an issue they view as important. By engaging with political leaders and institutions that previously seemed out of reach, and raising their public visibility as community leaders, many youth expressed a feeling of empowerment. In cases where youth-led campaigns have managed to achieve tangible policy changes, youth reported to NDI building a particular sense of confidence, motivation, and dedication to remain politically active.

NDI has guided youth in **expanding their participation across political entry points** by playing a variety of roles, entering different political spaces, and engaging a variety of political actors. To support youth-led campaigns, NDI has utilized its extensive political networks to help youth engage local and national government agencies, elected officials, political party leaders, and other power holders. Youth from different political parties have been able to work together and develop networks with youth from civil society groups, and vice versa. Some youth have engaged in multiple programs and thereby played multiple roles, including as grassroots advocates, online activists, and community volunteers. As described above, NDI has also assisted some youth in campaigning for public office. Through these efforts, youth have built their confidence and experience, and demonstrated to communities that they are able and willing to play multiple political roles.

Enabling Environment

Over nearly 10 years, NDI's work in Kosovo has contributed to building an enabling environment for youth

participation. Programs have created spaces for diverse young women and men to interact and build relationships with power holders, including political, government, and other community leaders at the local and national levels. These relationships have provided avenues for youth to demonstrate their competence and value. Youth have leveraged and strengthened these intergenerational relationships by collaborating with power holders to address shared interests.

“Many youth have been able to use their work with NDI as a starting point to gain more experience and exposure to leaders within their political parties, which then allowed them to build high-level relationships, demonstrate their abilities and advance to higher positions in the party” -NDI/Kosovo team member

In addition to adapting assistance to accommodate different skill levels and needs among different youth, NDI has **recognized and sought to address structural inequities and barriers** that often place young women and ethnic minorities at a disadvantage compared to other youth. NDI has encouraged these youth to counter negative norms and stigmas that further exclude them by demonstrating the positive influence they can have as leaders in their communities. In interviews with NDI, some young women reported that, as a result of taking public leadership roles and demonstrating their ability to propose solutions to complex public issues, they gained credibility and respect within their communities. NDI has remained cognizant of the risk of intimidation or threats to young women who become publicly active, and regularly monitored program activities to mitigate tensions or challenges to young women in their activism.

NDI’s assistance for ethnic minority communities has addressed the unique challenges they face at both the local and national levels. Most ethnic minority communities - and ethnic Serbs in Northern Kosovo, in particular - live in homogeneous communities with complex governance challenges due to the ongoing process of transitioning these areas from Serbian to Kosovar government control. These complexities hamper the delivery of public services and make it particularly difficult to identify and engage political decision makers; for example, in many cases, informal community leaders hold power over local decisions instead of formally elected leaders. NDI has drawn on its political expertise and the knowledge of local staff to help ethnic Serb youth navigate these complex and often dysfunctional local institutions through advocacy work. Further, beyond the local level, many ethnic minority youth have never traveled outside of their communities or had any contact with Kosovo’s national institutions. NDI has provided opportunities, including small group meetings and study trips, for ethnic minority youth to visit Kosovo’s capital, Pristina, to familiarize themselves with the central government and interact with national ethnic minority and majority political leaders.

NDI has created spaces for youth to interact and build relationships with power holders, including small group meetings with individual leaders and roundtable policy discussions with multiple leaders. For example, to support the efforts of youth-led issue advocacy campaigns, NDI has organized roundtable events for youth to seek the support of local and national level leaders from political parties, government, members of parliament (MPs), and local elected officials. These events have taken place at the local, regional and national levels, and have generally focused on addressing a community need. During these events, young women and men have constructively voiced their concerns regarding a particular issue, presented research they conducted, and proposed policy solutions. These interactions have allowed youth to establish initial relationships with power holders that serve as avenues for accessing and attempting to influence decision-making processes. It is important to note that NDI has often been able to create this space due to its strong relationships with top officials and its high level of credibility in Kosovo.

Creating Space for Youth/Power Holder Interaction

NDI worked with youth to organize a roundtable event with political and government leaders as part of an inter-ethnic advocacy campaign to improve access to internships for university students. As a result of the relationships established during the roundtable, the youth began to work with the Ministry of Labor and a university in Pristina to establish a new program to provide internships to all students.

NDI has supported young people in Kosovo to continue to reach out to and engage power holders through the above-described roundtable discussions, one on one meetings, and other forms of engagement. Through this contact, young women and men have demonstrated their ability to effectively organize themselves, comprehend and propose solutions to complex public policy issues, and their commitment to improving the welfare of their communities. In interviews with NDI, young people reported that these interactions have contributed to **establishing a greater value among power holders and community members for youth participation**, as they have come to see young people as competent and able to make valuable contributions to political deliberations and decisions. These leaders have made commitments to advance issues raised by youth-led advocacy groups, and in some cases they have gone on to take action, such as initiating further discussion on the issue in Parliament or enacting new policies.

In these cases, leaders have begun to look past participants' young ages to view them as equally capable citizens and leaders. This has particularly been the case when youth have been able to build specific skill sets that are in demand by leaders within their organizations. For example, several New Media School graduates have been given ownership of political party communications due to their newly developed skills in social media communication, graphic design, and media relations.

To supplement these youth-led efforts and further contribute to establishing value for youth participation, NDI has often shared public opinion research with political party leaders that reveals youth perceptions of their parties and policies that youth care about. Since young people make up the majority of Kosovo's population and a significant proportion of the voting population, this has provided incentives for party leaders to make more concerted efforts to become more responsive to and inclusive of young people. This has encouraged leaders to place young women and men in prominent positions within their parties, appoint them to Ministerial posts, and include them on party lists during elections.

NDI has provided technical assistance and mentorship to youth in leveraging their relationships with power holders to **strengthen intergenerational collaboration**. By continuing to engage with power holders to address issues of common interest, youth have continued to strengthen relationships of mutual understanding, trust and respect. In turn, this has led to more consistent opportunities for youth to play meaningful roles in policy discussions and decisions. Young people who have been involved in NDI programs and subsequently been elected to public office or advanced within their agencies or political parties have also served as champions and mentors for other youth. This has been particularly valuable for ethnic Serbs and other minority youth in Northern Kosovo. NDI has often engaged these young elected leaders to support youth-led campaigns.

Establishing Value for Youth Participation

A young woman who participated in NDI's inter-ethnic leadership and advocacy program used the experience as a springboard to build her career in politics. Through the program, she led an innovative campaign alongside other youth from her small Northern Kosovo town of Vushtrri to improve traffic safety near schools and provide work opportunities for single mothers, which they identified as priority issues in their town. The local mayor was impressed by her leadership ability, and asked her to work on his campaign for reelection in 2013. After winning the election, the mayor appointed her as Director of the local Department of Youth, Culture and Sport. In her interactions with community members through her role in the local government, citizens have been impressed by her work and expressed a desire to see more skilled, energetic youth in public leadership.

Youth who are active at the grassroots level have also proven their ability to serve as mentors for other young people within their communities. For example, through inter-ethnic advocacy initiatives implemented with support from NDI, groups of 15-20 youth have managed to engage hundreds of other young people - including youth under 18 - in campaign activities like public awareness raising events and public meetings with local leaders. In interviews with NDI, participants reported that other youth have jumped at the chance to plug into an opportunity to make a positive contribution to their communities. New Media School campaigns have had a similar effect, activating more young people who are idle, unemployed and eager to become active and make a

difference. When young community members have seen the successes their peers are achieving without financial support or high level family political connections, they have begun to believe that they, too, can play a role as agents of change. As another form of intergenerational collaboration, these infectious efforts have been a positive way to inspire the next generation of young activists and leaders.

Conclusion: Progress toward more Youth-Inclusive Politics

Improvements in youth agency and the enabling environment for youth participation have contributed over time to establishing political practices among some power holders that are more inclusive of young people. As young women and men have built their agency and strategically engaged power holders through collective, organized political action, they have begun to establish a greater value among many political leaders for the value of youth participation. These relationships have allowed

youth to collaborate with power holders on a range of public decisions, from gaining protected status from the Ministry of Environment for two historical nature sites to allocation of municipal government funds for the establishment of animal shelters.

It is important to note that increased instances of collaboration between youth and individual or small groups of power holders does not necessarily signify systemic change regarding youth political inclusion. These leaders who have become more supportive of youth participation are still constrained by their own competing political priorities and those of their organizations and parties. Further, “double” discrimination against young women, ethnic minorities and other marginalized communities remain among many leaders, placing them at a greater disadvantage compared to other youth. However, despite these additional challenges, NDI has seen young women and ethnic minorities advance to publicly elected leadership positions, suggesting incremental changes.

The gradual changes described above suggest that continued efforts by the current and future youth generations to demonstrate their commitment, competence and contributions can continue to erode sociocultural and institutional barriers to the participation of diverse youth, and ultimately establish norms of youth political participation.

Engaging Young Leaders as Mentors

Fifteen ethnic minority youth in NDI’s programs were elected to local and national leadership positions during the 2010 and 2013 Kosovo elections. NDI has continued to involve these elected leaders in program activities, through such activities as study visits to the Kosovo Assembly for ethnic Serb youth. With a history of war and repression by the state, the opportunity to see their community members in public leadership positions opens their mind to their potential role in political leadership. Recognizing the importance of these relationships, an NDI-supported group in the municipality of Leposavic is managing a program to support communication opportunities between central level Kosovo leadership and citizens in northern municipalities. This initiative has provided valuable opportunities for ethnic minority youth to learn about political developments, such as the pending establishment of the Association of Serb Municipalities, which is part an ongoing process to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo.

Lessons from Jordan [9]



University students participate in a national debate competition

Overview

Since 2012, NDI has implemented a two-phased program in Jordan to strengthen youth political participation. In partnership with 28 universities, the program has provided students with civic education (phase 1) and technical assistance in taking organized political action (phase 2). According to standard monitoring and evaluation reports, the program has resulted in improved levels and frequency of political participation among youth involved. In part, this can be attributed to increases in youth agency and gradual progress in the development of an enabling environment for their active, meaningful engagement, which aligns with NDI's unified theory of change for youth political participation programs. In February 2017, NDI conducted a substantive review of the program to gain a better understanding of how it has achieved these results. The study uncovered several lessons and related program features that explain the process of simultaneously developing agency and an enabling environment, and how the two dimensions combine to help drive sustained youth participation.

Study Methodology

To conduct the study, NDI's DC-based Program Officer for Youth Participation traveled to Jordan and held semi-structured interviews with program staff, 19 current and former participants (including 11 women), and representatives of universities where the program operates. Staff included the NDI's Resident Country Director in Jordan, the Program Manager, five Amman-based program staff, and nine regional and local coordinators responsible for implementing the program across Jordan. University representatives included one Dean of Student Affairs and one Vice Dean of Student Affairs from their respective universities, who have been involved in the program from its outset. Through the interviews, the program officer gathered information on how NDI involved youth in the design, management and evaluation of programs. The program officer also explored the experiences of youth in the programs, including their motivations for joining, whether and how it has affected their ability to meaningfully participate in political processes, and perceptions of the value of NDI's work and how it has influenced practices of youth political participation in Jordan. In discussions with university representatives, the program officer gathered their perspectives on how the program has impacted

students. The program officer also observed activities at four universities.

Description of Jordan program

Young Jordanian men and women, who make up more than 70 percent of the country's population, have had few opportunities to engage in politics and public decision making. This stems, in part, from sociocultural norms and perceptions that identify youth as irresponsible and lacking the life experience required to participate in serious deliberations. This is reflected in the formal education system, which has not traditionally informed young people about political processes or encouraged their active participation. Likewise, educational practices focus on rote memorization and repetition and the system often discourages individual analysis, which can undermine youth confidence in sharing their own ideas and opinions. Moreover, there have been no mechanisms for young people to learn how public decisions are made, what their rights are as citizens, and where and how they can access political processes. Young women face additional barriers to political participation due to sociocultural norms that have discouraged women from being assertive and playing leadership roles.

To help better position young people as active citizens and to open Jordan's political processes to their participation, NDI has partnered with 28 Jordanian universities and the Ministry of Education to implement a two-phased program with university students across the country. Since 2010, more than 20,000 young women and men have completed the first phase of the program, called "Ana Usharek" ("I participate"), which is a semester-long, extracurricular series of educational discussions on democracy, human rights and citizenship. More than 2,000 youth have completed the second phase, Usharek+, through which NDI has worked more intensively with a select group of Ana Usharek graduates over an academic year to organize issue-based campaigns, participate in a national debate competition and hold policy dialogues with political leaders. Although this review contains some analysis and lessons from Ana Usharek, it focuses mainly on Usharek+ due to its support for organized political activism, which has contributed to both youth agency and the supportive environment for their participation. Participant evaluation surveys show that Ana Usharek has had a positive effect on individual knowledge, skills and attitudes, but its confinement to classroom learning limited its contributions to creating a more supportive environment for youth political participation outside of the university campus.



Youth take part in a team-building activity as part of Usharek+

Typically, Ana Usharek graduates have been selected to move on to Usharek+ based on their: level of participation in the preceding discussions; expressed interest in solving a problem in their communities; willingness to lead a change effort; and ability to commit the time and energy. Usharek+ participants have carried out more than 55 campaigns to address a variety of public issues, including improving accessibility for people with disabilities on university campuses, improving local-level transportation services and infrastructure, and protecting freedom of speech. Participants have also engaged in dialogue with peers and political leaders on social, political and economic issues through regional and national debate competitions that are aired on television and radio. NDI has facilitated opportunities for Usharek+ participants to meet local and national political leaders, including Members of Parliament, senior government officials and others, through regional dialogues to discuss solutions to contemporary policy issues. Usharek+ youth have also participated in intensive "Winter and Summer Schools of Politics", where they have built additional skill sets to support their political participation, such as media relations techniques or skills related to campaigning for public office.

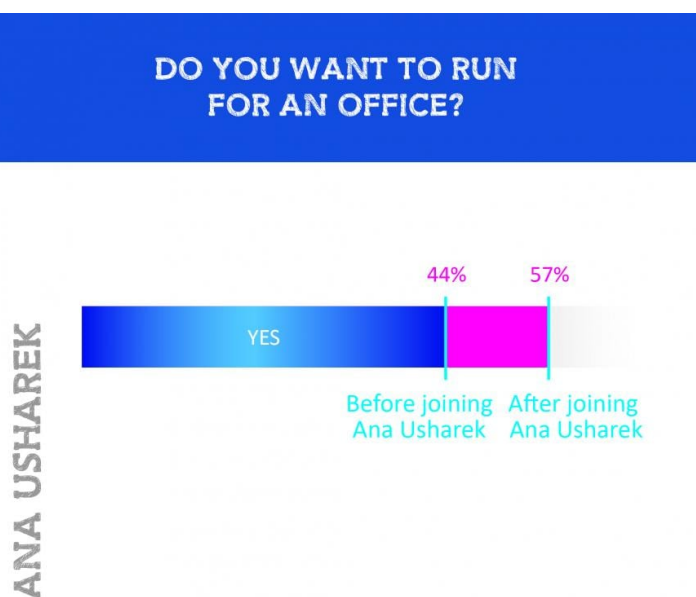
Analysis through the Unified Theory of Change:

This section summarizes how NDI's Jordan program exemplifies ways to address the different elements within the theory of change in order to shape new political practices surrounding youth participation. The descriptions are supplemented with feature boxes containing quotes from interviews conducted during this study, as well as supporting examples from the program.

Youth Agency

After completing NDI's program, young people have reported and demonstrated improved willingness and ability to participate in politics - or agency - both individually and collectively. Participant evaluation surveys have shown that Ana Usharek and Usharek+ graduates have improved knowledge of democratic processes, increased interest to participate in politics, and a more positive perception about the role they can play in shaping their communities. In interviews with NDI during this study, current and former participants, including women and men, described that the program has transformed the way they perceive politics, with growing confidence in their ability to play an active role. In a survey following the 2013-2014 program year, 96 percent of program graduates said that they intended to remain politically active. In interviews with NDI, participants described having a greater interest in voting or engaging in discussions with peers and family about politics as a result of the program.

"Every person has power. This program teaches young people how to use their power in a positive way." -NDI program beneficiary



NDI tailored the program to **meet youth where they are**, by elevating youth voice in program design, planning and management. The program has been led by young Jordanians, including staff who have worked in the Amman office, local coordinators stationed at universities, and regional coordinators who have been responsible for overseeing program implementation in four regions where the program has operated. Many team members have been graduates from the program themselves at the universities where they have been stationed. Local coordinators at each university have been responsible for recruiting and managing relationships with participants, including participant recruitment and facilitation of discussion and training sessions. These coordinators are given substantial freedom in tailoring training content and methodologies to their own strengths and the needs and interests of youth at their assigned universities. Regional coordinators have attended Ana Usharek sessions to provide mentorship and support for local coordinators, and have coordinated with NDI staff in Amman to guide program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Amman-based staff, as well as local and regional coordinators, have been given regular opportunities to reflect and provide feedback on the program design and delivery, including regular team meetings and annual reflection and planning sessions. Having young people leading the program has not only helped tailor the program to the interests of youth, but also encouraged youth engagement in the program. In interviews with NDI during this study, participants expressed being inspired by the confidence and leadership capability of youth on the program team, which encouraged them to join and fully engage in the program.

Young women have generally been eager to participate in the program alongside young men, and have comprised more than half of program participants. The program staff have described this as a result of the

program's setting at universities, where most youth have been elite and had more progressive views regarding gender equality compared to much of the population, where gender inequality and discrimination would prevent women from getting involved in political matters or participating in a program alongside men. To address potential hesitation by young women to participate in the program, NDI has included at least one young woman coordinator at most universities where the program operates. While facilitating discussion sessions and workshops, local coordinators have also encouraged women to speak up and for young women and men participants to collaborate during discussions and group work.

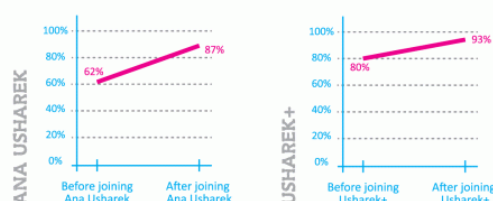
Ana Usharek and Usharek+ have strengthened assets among young men and women that have contributed to improving their participation in politics and public life, including knowledge of democratic concepts and processes, technical skills, and "soft skills". Through educational discussion sessions and the practice of taking organized political action, youth learned about democratic concepts, the structure of their government and the different components of the political cycle. In interviews with NDI, current and former participants described that learning about how political institutions function through Ana Usharek and Usharek+ helped shed light on processes that they previously saw as opaque and inaccessible, which left them feeling encouraged to continue their involvement in politics and public life. Participants also described to NDI that they built valuable technical skills related to policy advocacy, policy analysis, research, media relations and debates. Participants also reported that the experience of learning and working alongside others in the classroom, as well as through campaigns, policy dialogues, and debates, have resulted in improved soft skills, including critical thinking, interpersonal skills, communication, goal orientation and self-efficacy.

Learning-by-doing has been the methodological approach for Usharek+, through which NDI has assisted youth in leading collective action through issue-based campaigns at the local and national levels. With guidance from NDI, youth have joined forces based on shared interest in an issue, and collaboratively planned and implemented campaigns. In interviews with NDI, participants described being motivated to engage politically by the opportunity to take action to directly address an issue they view as important. In several cases, this motivation led youth to continue working on their campaigns beyond the end of the program.

Through Usharek+, NDI has guided youth in expanding their participation across political entry points by engaging a variety of political actors and playing different roles. In addition to their campaigns, which have brought them in contact with a variety of local and national power holders, youth have interacted with elected leaders, civil society leaders, and other activists through the policy dialogues and debate competitions. Leading up to and during the 2015 parliamentary elections, NDI supported youth in taking on new political roles, including volunteering on candidates' campaigns, raising awareness of the elections through social media campaigns, advocating for candidates to prioritize issues important to youth, observing the elections process, and leading voter education activities. Through these additional opportunities to build skills and take part in

"The Ana Usharek program is designed to place young Jordanians in a learning environment that encourages them to speak out, think critically, and form their own opinions through discussions with their peers." - NDI/Jordan team member

HOW KNOWLEDGEABLE ARE YOU ABOUT COMPONENTS OF A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT?



Youth participate in an exercise about gender equality

other activities around the elections, youth have been able to raise their public profiles and demonstrate their ability and interest to play multiple political roles.

Enabling Environment

To a lesser extent than youth agency, the Jordan program has contributed to developing an enabling environment for youth political participation. Through the various program activities, youth have engaged power holders and built relationships that have allowed them to influence some local-level decisions. In cases where youth have worked on campaigns to address national level issues, they have had some success in

"Students contributed to developing an enabling program demonstrate a completely different way of thinking about society, with a more disciplined desire to play a publicly active role. They also demonstrate improved abilities to engage constructively with others". - University Dean of Student Affairs

gaining supporters within parliament who have made efforts to advance issues highlighted by youth. Through their campaigns, as well as policy dialogues and debate competitions, young people have made an impression on power holders as competent activists and leaders who can understand complex policy issues and propose solutions. These efforts have led to some new opportunities for youth to participate in policy deliberations and voice their opinions to power holders.

Through the Jordan program, NDI has **created space for young women and men to interact with power holders**. As described above, youth have engaged university instructors, deans, local and national political leaders and other power holders through their campaigns and policy dialogues. Through these spaces, youth have established initial relationships with power holders.

In designing and implementing the Jordan program, NDI has **recognized and made efforts to mitigate structural inequities** that present a deeper set of challenges to the political participation of young women, who are further underrepresented in political leadership and public life than young men. The Ana Usharek curriculum includes discussions about the importance of gender equality in democratic societies. The program has had a positive influence in this regard on participants, as post-program participant surveys show that program graduates have more positive views regarding gender equality, and that women who complete the program have demonstrated improved confidence and desire to engage in public life. Further, program staff and participants reported to NDI that, through Usharek+, the heightened visibility of young women in televised debate competitions has provided an example to demonstrate to the public and power holders that young women are equally competent and able to play valuable roles in politics. Although structural gender inequities remain outside of NDI's program and university campuses, the heightened public visibility of young women through Usharek+ may have contributed more discussions about the role of women in politics and public life.

Building on these initial relationships, NDI assists youth in continuing to reach out to power holders to demonstrate their competence and commitment to having a positive impact on their community, in order to **establish a greater value for youth participation**. In meetings with political leaders as part of their campaigns, youth take a lead role in engaging leaders during the meetings by discussing the issue at hand and constructively proposing solutions. According to NDI staff and participants, this has helped to demonstrate the ability of youth to understand complex policy issues and play a valuable role in addressing them. Youth have also been at center stage in debates and regional forums. The performance of youth in these activities has made an impression on political leaders, establishing that many youth are committed and able to play meaningful roles as political activists and leaders.

Leveraging relationships youth have built with power holders, NDI has assisted participants in strengthening **intergenerational collaboration**. Through their campaigns, youth have worked with university administrators and local level political leaders to achieve positive, concrete outcomes, such as refining university curricula, improving local transportation services for university students, and addressing local infrastructure and traffic safety issues. Youth who have led campaigns on national level issues, such as combating gender based violence and child labor, or lowering the minimum legal age to run for public office, have also managed to gain

support from members of parliament and other decision makers who have influence over the issue at hand. For example, some members of parliament have initiated discussions in plenary sessions and committee meetings to address issues elevated by youth-led campaigns. Although the solutions to these issues are complex, youth have reported to NDI having a sense of empowerment that they were able to gain some level of response from high-level political leaders and initiate a step forward to addressing an issue they care about.

Conclusions: Progress toward more Youth-Inclusive Politics

The review of the Jordan program has suggested that improvements in youth agency and an enabling environment for youth political participation have had a positive influence on practices of youth political participation in Jordan.

The effects on youth agency are more clear, as many youth have both expressed and

demonstrated improved assets for political participation and a willingness to remain sustainably engaged in politics and public life. Not all program graduates have devoted themselves to full-time careers in politics, but in interviews with NDI, many described a greater commitment to following political developments, engaging in policy discussions with friends and family, and voting. Several graduates also described being more likely to devote time occasionally to volunteering on campaigns or other sporadic political engagements as a result of NDI's program.

"Although the change is slow-moving, our work through Usharek+ is contributing to greater appreciation and respect among leaders and citizens for youth political participation." -NDI program beneficiary

Changes in the enabling environment are more limited. Youth have managed to work effectively with power holders to achieve public policy changes and facilitate high level policy discussions, even in the national parliament. However, these relationships with individual power holders have not yet translated to "writ large" changes in institutional practices of political participation. Outside of NDI's program, youth largely remain marginalized from political decision making, and no new, formalized avenues for youth participation have been created. It is important to note that discussions with Usharek+ staff have revealed that the setting of the program at universities poses advantages and disadvantages to the wider impact of the program. The advantage is that universities are well-respected institutions within Jordanian society, which has helped provide access to high level public officials during the program for the purpose of advancing youth-led campaigns and involving power holders in policy dialogues and debates. A disadvantage is that communities and public leaders may have seen youth efforts through the program as simply part of their university studies, which staff believe may have limited the translation of these efforts to more systematic changes regarding youth participation.

However, the results achieved by this program are significant given that Jordan previously had very little organized youth participation. The outcomes described above suggest that the program has begun chipping away at the sociocultural and institutional barriers that exclude youth from politics. More systematic change will likely require longer-term efforts beyond a five year program.

CHANGE MY COMMUNITY

Beginner tools for taking action, being heard and improving your world.



Getting Started

Ready to run a grassroots campaign? As a first step, visit this page for key concepts and considerations for getting started.
[Find out more.](#)



Campaign Strategy

Once you've mastered the basic concepts, use this page to develop a strategy and plan for your campaign.
[Find out more.](#)



Running the Campaign

When you've planned your campaign and are ready to put it into action, visit this page for resources that can help you more effectively implement different components of your campaign.
[Find out more.](#)



Reflection

You're done with your campaign! Visit this page to reflect on your experience and see what you have learned.
[Find out more.](#)

Change My Community Site

In cooperation with the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, NDI developed "Change My Community, an online tool box that provides practical guidance and resources for young leaders working to change their communities. The tool box recognizes the power of organized political activism to advance positive change and focuses on the dynamic process of planning and running a grassroots campaign. Such campaigns could be carried out in a village, a neighborhood, or on a university campus for instance. In each case, the purpose of the campaign would be to convince a decision-making authority to address an immediate community need.

Although the toolbox is tailored for young people, it may be useful for any citizen who is interested in designing and carrying out a local campaign.

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