



MODULE 10

YOUTH IN POLITICS



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MODULE 10: YOUTH IN GOVERNANCE AND POLITICS

1. Introduction to governance and politics

Youth are critical agents of change in society. They bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and new energy to governance and political processes. This manual is designed to equip Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with the knowledge, tools, and strategies to engage and empower youth in governance and politics. It aims to build the capacity of CSOs to facilitate meaningful youth participation, promote political awareness, and advocate for youth-friendly policies and practices.

1.2 Objectives of the Module

By the end of this training manual, participants will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of youth involvement in governance and politics.
2. Identify the challenges and opportunities for youth participation in political processes.
3. Learn strategies to engage youth effectively in decision-making and policy advocacy.
4. Develop programs and initiatives to promote youth leadership in governance and politics.
5. Advocate for policies and frameworks that support youth political participation.

1.3 Key Concepts to be explored

- **Understanding the Role of Youth in Governance and Politics**
 - Definition and importance of youth participation in governance.
 - Global and regional trends in youth political engagement.
 - The impact of youth involvement on democratic processes and development.
- **Challenges and Barriers to Youth Participation**
 - Social, cultural, and economic barriers preventing youth engagement.
 - Political exclusion and limited access to decision-making platforms.
 - Gender disparities and the marginalization of young women in politics.

- Lack of youth-friendly policies and structures.
- Youth apathy and disengagement: Causes and solutions.
- **Opportunities for Youth in Governance and Politics**
 - The increasing role of youth in social movements and activism.
 - Youth involvement in local, national, and international governance processes.
 - Digital platforms and social media as tools for political engagement.
 - Youth-led political parties, youth councils, and community organizations.
- **Building Youth Leadership in Governance**
 - The importance of youth leadership for democratic development.
 - Strategies for developing youth leaders within communities and organizations.
 - Training and capacity-building programs for young leaders.
 - Mentoring and peer-to-peer support networks.
 - The role of CSOs in identifying and nurturing young political leaders.
- **Strategies for Engaging Youth in Political Processes**
 - Creating platforms for youth participation in political and governance discussions.
 - Encouraging youth involvement in policy-making and advocacy.
 - Organizing youth forums, debates, and town hall meetings to foster dialogue.
 - Collaborating with political parties to ensure youth representation.
 - Promoting voter education and engagement campaigns targeted at young people.
 - Using digital tools and social media to mobilize and organize youth.
- **Youth Advocacy for Policy Change**
 - Identifying key policy issues affecting youth (e.g., education, employment, healthcare, climate change).
 - How to organize effective youth-led advocacy campaigns.
 - Lobbying for youth-friendly policies and the inclusion of youth in political decision-making.
 - Building coalitions and alliances with other stakeholders (government, media, international organizations).
 - Monitoring and evaluating the impact of youth-led policy advocacy.

- **Case Studies of Successful Youth Political Engagement**
 - Global examples of successful youth-led political movements (e.g., youth-led protests, youth representation in government).
 - Case study of youth involvement in local and national elections.
 - Youth participation in policy reforms and governance structures.
 - Lessons learned and best practices from successful youth engagement efforts.
- **Overcoming Challenges and Promoting Sustainability**
 - Addressing political, financial, and logistical barriers to youth participation.
 - Promoting inclusivity and ensuring that youth from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to participate.
 - Building sustainable networks for youth political involvement.
 - Strengthening youth leadership capacities to continue advocating for youth-friendly policies.
 - Ensuring the continued involvement of youth in governance beyond elections.

2. Understanding the Role of Youth in Governance and Politics

Youth represent a significant portion of the global population, with more than 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 worldwide. Their active involvement in governance and politics is crucial for sustainable development and democratic governance. Youth bring innovative ideas, fresh perspectives, and energy to the political arena, making their participation essential for shaping the future.

Youth participation in governance and politics is more than just voting in elections. It involves engaging in decision-making processes, advocating for policies that reflect the needs of young people, and holding governments accountable for their actions. When youth are included in governance, they become key contributors to building more inclusive, transparent, and accountable political systems.

2.1 What is Governance?

Governance refers to the processes, structures, and practices through which a society manages its affairs, resources, and development. It encompasses the actions taken by various actors—government bodies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders—in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies that address societal and economic challenges. Simply put, governance involves the decisions, processes, and mechanisms that guide policymaking and ensure its effective implementation.

Governance is not limited to government actions alone but includes the participation and influence of various entities and sectors that collectively contribute to managing a country or community's resources, social issues, and development strategies.

Key Definitions of Governance:

1. **Political Authority and Institutional Resources:** Governance can be defined as “the exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage problems and the affairs of society.”
2. **World Bank Definition:** According to the World Bank, “Governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.”
3. **Rhodes’ Definition:** According to Rhodes, “Governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state.”
4. **Hyden’s Definition:** Hyden describes governance as “the stewardship of the formal and informal political rules of the game. Governance refers to those measures that involve setting the rules for the exercise of power and settling conflicts over such rules.”

Good Governance: Good governance relates to the political and institutional processes and outcomes that are necessary to achieve the goals of development. Good governance is particularly important at local level, where governments interact with citizens and communities daily, in our context local government.

Democratic / participatory governance is premised on inclusiveness. Participatory governance (Citizen-centered governance; Citizen engagement; Citizen empowerment; Citizen involvement, Democratic engagement). PG is a method of management in which decision makers, whether with primary or delegated authority, are committed to involving affected constituencies in decisions as much as possible.

Principles that guide good and participatory governance

- Representation and Participation
- Responsiveness
- Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Openness and Transparency
- Rule of Law
- Ethical Conduct
- Competence and Capacity
- Innovation and Openness to Change
- Sustainability and Long-term Orientation
- Sound Financial Management
- Human Rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion
- Accountability.

Worth noting: representation does not necessarily guarantee inclusiveness, particularly as youth are largely excluded from representative institutions. Moreover, the findings of the World Value Survey research conducted between 2010 and 2014 show significant differences in voter turnout between people aged 25 or under and those aged 26 or over.

3.Challenges and Barriers to Youth Participation

While there are many opportunities for youth engagement, several barriers prevent young people from fully participating in governance and politics:

- **Political Exclusion:** Many political systems lack formal mechanisms for youth participation, leading to exclusion from decision-making bodies.
- **Cultural Norms and Discrimination:** In some societies, traditional beliefs or gender stereotypes limit youth participation, particularly for young women and marginalized groups.
- **Economic Barriers:** Limited access to education, employment opportunities, and economic independence can discourage youth from engaging in political processes.
- **Lack of Information:** Youth often lack awareness of their rights, the political processes, and how to get involved, leading to disengagement.
- **Apathy and Disillusionment:** Some young people feel disconnected from the political process, viewing it as corrupt, inaccessible, or irrelevant to their daily lives.

4. Opportunities for Youth in Governance and Politics

Despite the challenges, there are growing opportunities for youth involvement in governance:

- **Youth Movements and Activism:** Social movements, often led by youth, are transforming political landscapes and pushing for greater social, environmental, and economic justice.
- **Digital Engagement:** The rise of social media and digital platforms has created new avenues for youth to engage politically, raise awareness, and mobilize others.

- **Youth in Political Parties:** Many political parties are recognizing the importance of youth engagement and establishing youth wings to involve young people in their operations and policy formation.
- **Youth Representation:** Some countries have introduced youth quotas or advisory councils to ensure youth representation in legislative and executive bodies.

5. Building Youth Leadership in Governance

Developing strong youth leaders is critical to ensuring continued youth participation in governance and politics. CSOs play an important role in fostering youth leadership through:

- **Leadership Training:** Providing young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to become effective leaders in their communities and political spheres.
- **Mentoring:** Establishing mentorship programs where experienced leaders guide and support the development of young leaders.
- **Youth Forums:** Organizing forums where young people can share ideas, learn from one another, and engage with political leaders.
- **Volunteerism and Community Service:** Encouraging youth to volunteer in their communities, which helps them develop a sense of civic duty and gain valuable experience.

6. Strategies for Engaging Youth in Political Processes

Effective strategies to engage youth in politics include:

- **Inclusive Policy Engagement:** Create opportunities for youth to participate in discussions about policies that affect their lives, such as through youth consultations, roundtables, and online forums.
- **Voter Education and Mobilization:** Promote voter education campaigns aimed at informing young people about their rights, the importance of voting, and how to engage with political candidates and parties.

- **Youth Councils and Advisory Bodies:** Support the creation of youth councils or advisory boards where young people can directly influence policy decisions.
- **Civic Education:** Incorporate civic education programs that teach young people about democratic processes, governance structures, and their role as active citizens.

7. Youth Advocacy for Policy Change

Youth are powerful advocates for change. By organizing advocacy campaigns, young people can push for policies that address their needs, such as improved access to education, employment, healthcare, and climate justice. Key strategies include:

- **Mobilization:** Use social media and public demonstrations to raise awareness about critical youth issues and demand political action.
- **Coalition Building:** Collaborate with other youth groups, civil society organizations, and political actors to build a united front for policy change.
- **Lobbying:** Engage with policymakers, providing them with data, case studies, and youth-led research to support the inclusion of youth-friendly policies.

8. Political Parties and Elections

While elections are not synonymous with democracy, they serve as a crucial indicator of the strength of a country's institutions, its commitment to the rule of law and political inclusion, and a reflection of citizens' key policy priorities. These assessments are especially important in Africa, where democracy remains the most favored form of government according to public opinion—66% of Africans express a preference for democracy, and 80% reject authoritarian rule. However, democracy is often perceived by citizens as underperforming, which underscores the importance of evaluating how effectively electoral processes function. Elections play a vital role in the consolidation of democratic governance.

In many African countries, including Lesotho, voter turnout has been historically low, particularly among the youth. For instance, the voter turnout in Lesotho's 2022 National Assembly Elections was at a record low of just 37% of registered voters. This trend has persisted since the country

adopted a multi-party electoral system in 1993. The youth, who make up the majority of Lesotho's population, are particularly disengaged. Several factors contribute to this apathy, including a deep mistrust of the electoral system and processes. This mistrust is fueled by issues such as poor service delivery, corruption, and the mismanagement of public funds. Additionally, the high unemployment rate leaves young people feeling that politics and elections fail to address their needs and aspirations.

When young people do participate in politics, it is often through ineffective channels where they are used as tools for political campaigns rather than as active decision-makers. Youth leagues, which are intended as platforms for youth inclusion, often end up promoting exclusion, as they do not lead to meaningful representation or inclusion in the executive decision-making bodies. While these leagues may provide opportunities for participation, they do not necessarily translate into real political influence or leadership positions for young people.

There is an urgent need for comprehensive reforms that ensure active youth participation in politics, both in voting and in shaping policy decisions. Without such reforms, the potential for sustainable development and meaningful democratic engagement remains limited.

Exercises:

Exercise 1: Scenario Setting

The participants will assume the roles of representatives from different political parties in Lesotho. The year is 2027, and the country has just concluded the National Assembly elections. The task is to elect the Prime Minister and form the Cabinet. This exercise will emphasize the importance of representative democracy and highlight how taking part in elections influences decision-making and governance.

Exercise 2: Budget Formulation and Analysis

Building on the previous module on budget formulation and analysis, participants will be divided into groups, each representing members of His Majesty's Cabinet. Using the current budget allocation, each group will develop ministerial plans and priorities. This exercise will demonstrate

how budget decisions impact governance and development and reinforce the importance of youth involvement in these processes to ensure that their needs and priorities are addressed.

Case Studies of Successful Youth Political Engagement

1. **The Arab Spring:** Youth-led protests and movements across the Arab world highlighted the power of young people in influencing political change.
2. **The #FridaysForFuture Movement:** Led by youth activist Greta Thunberg, this global movement mobilized young people to demand action on climate change from world leaders.
3. **Youth Representation in Rwanda:** Rwanda has made strides in integrating youth into governance, with youth representatives in parliament and local councils, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making.

9. Overcoming Challenges and Promoting Sustainability

To ensure lasting change, CSOs should work towards overcoming barriers and promoting sustainable youth engagement:

- **Create safe and inclusive spaces** for youth to engage in political discourse, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.
- **Develop long-term strategies** that continue youth involvement beyond elections or specific campaigns.
- **Provide ongoing training and support** to ensure youth leaders can navigate complex political landscapes.

10. Tips for Youth in Governance and Politics

- **Understand the Political System**

- **Educate Yourself:** Learn about the political system, institutions, and processes in your country. Understand the roles and responsibilities of elected officials, political parties, and government institutions.
- **Stay Informed:** Keep up with current events, policy changes, and political debates. This knowledge will help you make informed decisions and engage in meaningful discussions.
- **Know Your Rights:** Be aware of your rights as a citizen, including voting rights and freedom of expression, and understand how to assert these rights in the political arena.
- **Build Strong Leadership Skills**
 - **Develop Confidence:** Confidence is key to political engagement. Work on improving your communication skills, public speaking, and the ability to present your ideas clearly.
 - **Take Initiative:** Get involved in leadership roles at the local or community level, even if it's organizing an event or leading a youth group. These experiences build leadership qualities.
 - **Collaborate with Others:** Effective leaders understand the power of collaboration. Build networks with other youth, civil society organizations, and political groups to share ideas and resources.
- **Engage in Civic Education and Awareness**
 - **Promote Political Literacy:** Help your peers understand the political process. Organize workshops, discussions, and forums to increase awareness of political issues, elections, and governance.
 - **Advocate for Youth-Focused Policies:** Work with political parties or advocacy groups to push for policies that specifically address youth issues, such as education, employment, and healthcare.
 - **Use Digital Platforms:** Leverage social media and digital tools to share political content, mobilize your peers, and raise awareness about important issues in society.

- **Be an Active Voter**
 - **Vote and Encourage Others:** Your vote is your voice. Participate in elections and encourage other youth to vote by educating them about the importance of civic engagement.
 - **Understand the Issues:** Before voting, research the candidates and political platforms. Focus on issues that matter most to you and your community, and vote for leaders who align with those values.
 - **Be an Informed Voter:** Stay informed about the candidates' backgrounds, track records, and proposed policies. Attend town hall meetings, debates, and other events to learn more about what each candidate stands for.

- **Use Your Voice to Advocate for Change**
 - **Engage in Advocacy:** Participate in campaigns, protests, and movements that aim to bring about political or social change. Use your voice to challenge injustice and advocate for policies that support young people.
 - **Speak Up Against Corruption:** Hold government officials accountable for their actions. Advocate for transparency, good governance, and anti-corruption measures in your community.
 - **Participate in Public Consultations:** Many governments and organizations hold public consultations to gather feedback on policies. Participate in these opportunities to ensure your voice is heard.

- **Get Involved in Political Parties and Youth Leagues**
 - **Join Youth Political Organizations:** Many political parties have youth wings or youth-focused groups. Join these organizations to gain experience, influence party policies, and increase your chances of being involved in decision-making.

- **Pursue Internships and Volunteering:** Consider internships, volunteering, or temporary positions within political parties, government offices, or advocacy groups to gain firsthand experience in governance and politics.
- **Be a Political Candidate:** If you are passionate about making a difference, consider running for office or standing for leadership positions in youth organizations or local councils. Youth representation in politics is crucial for shaping policies that reflect young people's needs.
- **Stay Resilient and Persistent**
 - **Don't Be Discouraged by Setbacks:** Political engagement can be challenging. You may encounter resistance, frustration, or setbacks. Stay persistent, and remember that change often takes time.
 - **Learn from Others:** Look up to youth leaders who have successfully navigated the political landscape. Learn from their experiences and mistakes, and use their stories to inspire your own political journey.
 - **Focus on Long-Term Impact:** Change is not always immediate. Focus on making incremental progress and building lasting political and social structures for future generations.
- **Embrace Diversity and Inclusivity**
 - **Respect Different Viewpoints:** Politics involves diverse opinions. Learn to respect different viewpoints and engage in constructive debates. This will help you understand the complexities of governance and political dynamics.
 - **Promote Gender and Social Inclusion:** Advocate for policies and practices that ensure equal participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in political processes. Inclusivity is crucial for creating fair and democratic systems.
- **Build Alliances and Coalitions**

- **Form Alliances:** Work with like-minded individuals and groups who share your goals. Building alliances and coalitions with other youth, civil society organizations, and political actors can amplify your impact.
 - **Network with Mentors:** Seek guidance and mentorship from experienced political leaders, community organizers, or activists. Their insight can help you navigate the complexities of politics and governance.
- **Lead by Example**
 - **Be Ethical and Transparent:** Set an example by adhering to high standards of ethics, transparency, and integrity. Your credibility as a youth leader depends on your ability to act responsibly and with honesty.
 - **Serve with Purpose:** Remember that political leadership is about serving the people. Always focus on the needs of your community and prioritize their well-being in your political endeavors.

10. Conclusion

Youth have the power to shape the future of governance and politics. CSOs play an essential role in ensuring that youth voices are heard, valued, and included in political processes. By building leadership, advocating for youth-friendly policies, and providing platforms for engagement, CSOs can contribute to the development of more inclusive, democratic, and accountable governance systems.

11. Resources and Further reading

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