



YOUTH POWER

MAKING SPACE FOR YOUNG IDEAS TO CREATE SOCIAL CHANGE!

October 10th 2019 - young people from around the world facilitated a reflection on youth activism, new ways how young women and men make their voices heard and challenge participants what this means for the programming and policies of NGOs and donors.

WHAT MAKES YOUTH ACTIVISM UNIQUE?

YOUTH KNOW WHAT THEY NEED – AND ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT IT. WHETHER IT IS PREVENTING CLIMATE CHANGE OR HAVING A SAY OVER YOUR OWN BODY.

IDENTIFICATION WITH AN ACTIVIST/PERSON IS IMPORTANT – AS IDEAS WERE IN THE PAST.

YOUTH ACTIVISM HAS ITS OWN LANGUAGE.

YOUTH ACTIVISM HAS A LOT OF ENERGY. YOUTH WANT CHANGE NOW - THE PACE IS VERY FAST.

YOUTH ARE CREATIVE. THEY KNOW HOW TO FIND EACH OTHER – AND EASILY CONNECT PEER TO PEER.

WHAT DO DONORS AND INGOs NEED TO DO DIFFERENTLY TO BETTER SUPPORT YOUTH VOICES?

The positive role youth can play in development gets more and more recognized but their voice is often still not heard enough. Here is what participants thought donors and INGOs could do differently to better support youth voices:

Flexibility is the word.

- Samar, Tunisia

Make room for our passion. Listen. Make access to funding less bureaucratic, lighten administrative requirements and paperwork. Find ways to support different ways of organizing, like informal movements. For some of our movements, quick and easy access to funding for specific actions is key. Activism evolves fast - allow activities to be adjusted as needed.



Don't make us play volleyball when we want to play football.

- Emma, Kenya

Let (young) people be agents of their story. Support youth in their strategies - do not impose topics or tactics. Allow activists to develop their own approach, way of working and organization.

Invest in youth energy! Hire more young people - without "domesticating" young talents into your systems and agenda's. Make space for young people inside your organizations. This includes our ideas, ways of talking, working and connecting. Similarly, make sure your partner organizations make room for young people. And: pay your interns. Don't expect young people to work for free.

Large organizations are too often dominated by older men.

- Workshop participant

Youth are part of a larger struggle for social justice.

- Elena, Peru

Youth don't want to be an isolated target group. Young people want to be part of larger agendas and discussions. Have youth organizations in decision-making spaces together with "adult organizations".



Get our stories out. Support our political position. That can make a real difference. Risks that activists face are real. Put safeguarding measures for activists in place. Raise restrictions and harassment that civil society face with our governments. Support political voice and leadership of youth as much as education, employment and health.

Civic space is critical to everything.

– Workshop participant

Experiment and try new things.

– Workshop participant

Support peer-to-peer learning between young people. Similarly, equal exchanges between generations of activists are important. Be open to take risks – overly heavy bureaucracy should not become a stumbling block for meaningful collaboration. Try alternative ways of reporting and capturing results. Try alternative ways of reporting and capturing results. Explore new ways of funding.

Do not consider young people as a homogenous group. Be aware of intersectional challenges and barriers that young activists can face when different aspects of their identities overlap (such as their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, ethnic background, (dis)ability, and/or level of education) and adjust support accordingly to become more inclusive, responsive and accessible to the rich diversity within the label “young people”.

Everyone is unique based on their identity and lived experiences.

– Workshop participant

The challenge that we've seen and heard about today is around youth leadership, integrating young people into decision-making at all levels – national and local. But we need to ensure that there is no tokenism in their participation. We have also heard about the importance of working with 'non-youth' as champions to achieve success. This is an area where we can work together!

– Tijmen Rooseboom, Ambassador for Youth, Education and Employment, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK!



IBRAHIM

WHICH ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

60% of Nigerians are under 30. This is not reflected in political representation. We mobilized a movement of young people to lower the age for being able to run for election. The president eventually signed an amendment to the constitution which allows young people to run for state parliament at the age 25 instead of 30, for House of Representatives at 25 instead of 30, and for president at 35 instead of 40. As a direct result, we now have 22 MPs under the age of 30 in parliament.

WHAT WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS?

One of our turning points was when we started to use digital mobilization. We came up with our hashtag #NotTooYoungToRun. This helped the campaign really take off in 2016 because it helped us to enlarge our support base and have connections with youth groups all over the country.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CIVIC SPACE?

In Nigeria we have a vibrant civil society but face increasing challenges. For example, we can no longer demonstrate near any government or parliament building, when we want precisely officials and MPs to hear our voice. In this context, it is key to know the law. For example, many in Nigeria think you need to ask for permits for rallies, marches and demonstrations. But actually, you only need to inform the police. This is what we do.

EMMA



WHICH ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

In Kenya sexual and gender minority (SGM) groups face severe discrimination and risk of violence. It is currently still illegal in Kenya to have same sex relationships. Together with my organization – INEND – we have been able to set-up unusual alliances to promote and ensure the safety of members of the SGM community. Together with Bodaboda (motorcycle taxi operators) we formed an informal watchdog group that supported SGM members during a high-profile court case that challenged to decriminalize same-sex sexual activity in Kenya in 2018.

WHAT WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS?

We rely heavily on partnerships and networks that we have formed over the years. Due to the illegal nature of same sex relationships, any act of activism on these topics runs the risk creating conflicts with the local authorities. We have identified safe spaces and safe 'people' with whom we work together to ensure that SGMs access services without stigma. These partnerships are the result of years of awareness raising to the point that they became real partners and that they were confident enough to stand up for gender minorities.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CIVIC SPACE?

In Kenya, young activists are in general not taken seriously – and even less LGBT activists. Government officials are hard to reach and whenever you are able to make an appointment, they do not show up or do not treat us with respect. We also face a lot of safety issues. While there is a right of association embedded in the constitution of Kenya, there have been instances whereby law enforcement authorities harass organizations that provide especially health services to sexual and gender minorities. This is why we have set up a security mechanism so that when someone of us gets into trouble, we can support quickly. There is also support from the national level as needed, through an umbrella body for LGBT organisations in Kenya.



SAMAR

WHICH ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

We managed to put the light on a law that would give amnesty to businessmen who benefited from the corrupt economic and political system under the former Dictator Ben Ali. Even though the law was passed, we succeeded into narrowing its scope. We also revived the dynamics of street protests with new tools and new colours. Young people were leaders of political action and their decisions affected the highest circles of power.

WHAT WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS?

We organized as an open social movement. We took decisions together and inclusively; and we ensured that women and girls were represented. We became part of decision making. We managed to mobilize a very large and broad movement with lots of young activists, but also involving for example established civil society organizations like the women rights movement and families of the martyrs of the revolution activists who died in the Arab Spring), and football ultras groups. This way we managed to get a lot of popular support which was key to delay and change the scope of the law.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CIVIC SPACE?

In Tunisia we succeeded to gain more space for freedom of expression, thanks to the opportunity given to us by the Revolution. Also, we have a lot of support from people, which has made us stronger. The biggest challenge we have had is being an informal movement, we cannot ask for permits for demonstrations ourselves and government officials used to refuse to meet us because we are not a registered organization. Between 2015 and 2018, we made our voices heard through protests. Whenever there is something we cannot do as informal movement, we ask support from registered organizations.

MARIAM

WHICH ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Over the past years, we have been able to more and more unify the voices of young people to speak out against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and create new spaces for their engagement. The national movement that I am part of – Youth Anti-FGM Somaliland – has supported the set-up of youth forums in 6 regions to voice young people's views on FGM, facilitate dialogues in schools and engage with decision-makers on the need for improved legislation around FGM.

WHAT WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS?

We have found the importance of linking up to key moments in time, such as Human Rights Day or the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, to create momentum. Also, using a variety of different strategies – such as petitions, social media engagement, educational workshops for young people – can mutually reinforce each other.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CIVIC SPACE?

Somaliland is quite conservative. Asserting that women have a right to decide over their body is a taboo. As women rights activists we face restrictions from government but also harassment and threats from extremist religious groups. That is why we try to frame our topics in a less controversial way, for example by emphasizing the health risks of FGM. We have also found it hard to get support from donors for our work when we were working as an informal group of volunteers. For example, donors could not support us with just transport costs to reach remote villages.





BUSHRA

WHICH ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Motivating myself and other young people to be part of the development of their communities has been my biggest achievement. In my work with Oxfam we create platforms for young people in rural districts – so-called Innovation Hubs – linking young people to potential new jobs and supporting young social entrepreneurs. Next to this, we support social empowerment through life-skills education and developing negotiating power of young people.

WHAT WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS?

Perseverance and patience was- and is the key to success so far. It was a key learning that alone, you can only go so far. Joining up with your peers, groups or organizations who are working on the same cause is a key element essential for success.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CIVIC SPACE?

Civil society organizations in Pakistan struggle with how they are being perceived. People are sceptic, as we are seen as bringing “Western ideas”. We also face a lot of bureaucratic obstruction and struggle with government officials due to frequent change in political leadership and management. This is why we involve local government in our activities very closely so that they understand our work. We try to show them how our work can benefit their goals too and try to make them feel part of the change process, inviting them as “Ambassadors of Change” and linking our work to the SDG agenda of the government.

PAKEEZA

WHICH ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

In my community we have come together with a group of girls to raise awareness on the importance of education for girls. We started further mobilizing young people for girls’ education within our own village and in neighbouring communities. We even went to Sindh University and convinced one of the professors to come and talk with the community in favour of educating girls. Now, more and more parents are starting to send their girls to the nearby schools.

WHAT WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS?

It is important to work together – with other young people, but also beyond! Finding the right allies that can support our voices when space is limited can be key.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH CIVIC SPACE?

When I tried together with a few other girls to organize ourselves, we faced a lot of scrutiny both from officials and society. When five girls want to set up an association, it immediately raises suspicion. Especially working on girls’ education is perceived very negatively and portrayed as bringing Western ideas. Luckily, I managed to convince influential progressive family members to support me becoming an activist for girls’ empowerment. This gave me strength and helped convince others who wanted to block us.



COLOPHON

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