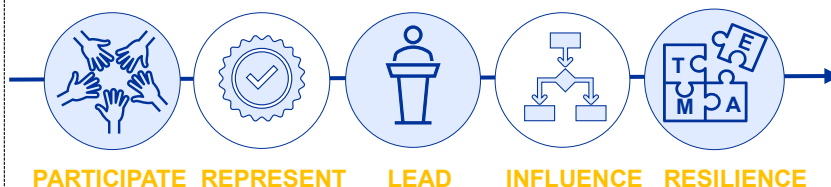


YOUTH & WOMEN AS POLITICAL DRIVERS

CHALLENGES

Across contexts, women & youth participate actively in civic & political life, yet significant barriers remain in translating participation into **agenda-setting power**, **leadership** positions & **decision-making influence**.

“ZERO TO S/HERO”



WHY MATTER

- Stronger legitimacy & trust in institutions
- More inclusive & responsive policies
- Greater democratic resilience & stability

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES & PRACTICES

1 Institutionalised Youth Representation	2 Co-creation, Innovation & Civic Engagement	3 Political Leadership, Inclusion & Party Reform	4 Inter Pares, Parliamentary Engagement & Reform
The Gambia. National Youth Parliament; National Youth Leadership Academy; EU Youth Advisory Committee engagement. Indian Ocean Region <i>Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius, La Réunion.</i> Regional Youth Parliament → Linking youth representatives with formal parliamentary structures. Madagascar. Gen Z youth mobilisation movement → Shows mobilisation power but limited when without institutional anchoring.	Senegal. Artistic & cultural activism → Civic mobilisation & political engagement happens beyond formal institutions. Ecuador. Fundacion Datalat, youth co-creation process → Youth developed policy recommendations on accountability & employment taken up by government. Nigeria. PROMAD Foundation, co-creation tables → Engaged young people with no prior experience in institutional dialogue. Philippines. GoodGovPH regional dialogues → Structured engagement between youth networks & government institutions. Nepal. Recent electoral developments following youth-led (Gen Z) protests → Rapidly evolving political landscape marked by emergence of new political actors entering formal governance.	Sri Lanka. One-Text Initiative → Multi-party support for women politicians, councillors' networks & intra-party gender equality plans contributed to increased representation. Ethiopia. Work with Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) & the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA) → Support to women politicians & women with disabilities preparing for elections; linked to electoral reforms improving accessibility & inclusion.	Zambia. Youth Parliamentary Academy with national assembly & Parliamentary peer-learning partnership → Direct engagement; gender-sensitive parliamentary reforms. Benin. Replication of Youth Parliamentary Academy Model → Transferability of parliamentary youth engagement approaches. Malaysia. Parliamentary partnership with Italy → Adoption of gender impact assessment methodologies & parliamentary gender self-assessment. Botswana. Parliamentary peer-learning partnerships → Strengthening gender-sensitive oversight & reform.
LESSON. Youth participation is strongest when anchored in formal, representative structures linked to decision-making.	LESSON. Innovative structured dialogue (beyond youth sounding boards) & joint problem-solving enable youth to directly shape policy & implementation.	LESSON. Political parties are key gatekeepers; leadership support must be matched by institutional reform, inclusive participation & engagement with parties.	LESSON. Parliaments can transform participation into sustained influence through engagement, oversight & youth-gender-responsive reform.

APPROACHES & TAKEAWAYS FOR TEAM EUROPE

- ✓ **Participation must translate into influence.** Representation alone is insufficient; inclusion requires real agenda-setting power, decision-making influence, accountability & institutionalised mechanisms for youth & women's (political) participation.
- ✓ **Democratic engagement is evolving.** Bridge activism, digital engagement, arts, culture & issue/community-based mobilisation with political parties, parliaments & formal institutions, linking grassroots voices to decision-making processes through co-creation, innovation & structured feedback loops.
- ✓ **Reach beyond the already engaged.** Include women, youth, persons with disabilities, rural communities & those outside donor-connected networks through deliberate & intersectional approaches that address both offline & online barriers, including VAW in politics.
- ✓ **Institutional reform & inclusion must go hand in hand.** Leadership training & capacity building are important, but must be matched by political will, inclusive institutions, strengthened political parties & parliaments & local governance pathways that create opportunities for participation & oversight.
- ✓ **Democracy support should prioritise long-term, adaptive investment.** Programmes should be context-specific, flexible & connected to peer learning & exchange, while allowing greater space for experimentation (“*licence to fail*”), iterative learning & rapid response.