Empowering Youth to Participate in Democratic Processes

With nearly half of the world’s population 25 years of age or younger, engaging youth in politics and the electoral process is key to building democratic stability. During more than 30 years of programming, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has found that a democracy flourishes when all citizens are informed about democratic principles and have the opportunities and knowledge to participate in decision-making processes. Recognizing that a healthy democracy enables and supports the engagement of all citizens, IFES prioritizes youth education and works to foster lifelong patterns of participation in community and public affairs. Through formal and nonformal programs, IFES works alongside election management bodies (EMBs), government institutions and civil society to create a culture of political and social responsibility for those who have not yet reached the age of enfranchisement, and supports newly enfranchised voters to invest in democracy.

Current IFES Programming

IFES programming delivers the following types of assistance to empower EMBs, civil society and young leaders to increase youth participation in democratic processes.

Formal and School-Based Programs

IFES works with schools and other youth-serving institutions to develop curricula at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels focusing on democracy and governance, citizenship and civic participation, election processes and human rights as well as companion teacher’s manuals.

Nonformal programs

IFES uses a broad variety of activities such as internships, peer-to-peer mentorship programs on civic and voter education, street theater to promote political participation and Democracy Camps rooted in participatory learning to encourage democratic participation.

Election-Cycle Activities

IFES collaborates with EMBs and civil society to ensure that young people are integrated throughout the electoral cycle in election administration and planning, voter education and registration, candidate nomination and training and election violence prevention.

Youth, Peace and Security

IFES engages youth as active participants in the political process to decrease the likelihood of involvement in violent conflict and civic unrest. Through peace pledges, workshops and town halls, IFES is committed to creating a stable and secure environment for meaningful civic participation.

Intersectional Approach

IFES programs employ an intersectional framework for all youth activities, focusing on inclusion of youth with disabilities, young women and youth from LGBTQ, minority and indigenous communities.
Program Highlights

Kenya
IFES collaborated with a local youth media organization and the Universities and Colleges Students’ Peace Association of Kenya to implement Changamka, a campus ambassador get-out-the-vote campaign that provided participants with information about the electoral process. Changamka included skills-based trainings to enhance ambassadors’ presentation and public speaking skills, instilling confidence to engage with and mobilize their peers through campus-based activities.

Kyrgyzstan
With local partners, IFES runs 10-day Democracy Camps for school-aged youth to educate participants on their country’s governance structure, citizens’ role within it and democratic concepts such as leadership, civic responsibilities and political participation. These values are embedded through interactive exercises and post-camp student action projects in which camp alumni become teachers and leaders in their communities.

Myanmar
IFES implements a civic education training program, “Your Voice, Your Vote, Your Future,” to develop knowledge, leadership skills and community action programs tailored to youth who will vote for the first time in the 2020 elections. IFES partners with local civil society organizations to design a contextualized curriculum and equip youth with the skills needed to spread awareness in their communities.

Bangladesh
IFES trains young political activists with the skills and tools to peacefully manage and mitigate conflict through the “People Against Violence in Elections (PAVE) Youth” module. Students from Dhaka University learn about the sources of violence and techniques to mitigate conflict and promote peaceful political engagement among their peers, across campus and within their communities.

Tunisia
IFES organized Hack4Democracy (H4D), an innovative combination of IFES’ Democracy Camp and hackathon models, which blends the latest technological advances at the nexus of youth participation. H4D promotes civic engagement through the competitive creation of new technological tools and builds professional competencies by providing networking opportunities, mentoring and incubation of the most promising projects.

Ukraine
IFES developed a civic education course for university youth, Democracy: From Theory to Practice, which is implemented in 31 Georgian universities and 22 Ukrainian universities. The course utilizes an interactive classroom environment to foster democratic values and attitudes; student action projects; and customized course readers that enhance knowledge of democratic principles, good governance, civil society, civic participation and human rights.

For more information, please visit our Youth Engagement page on www.IFES.org and follow @IFESYouth on Twitter.