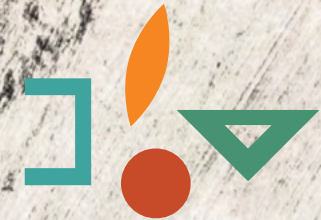


THE POWER OF DIALOGUE

Stories from across the Power of Dialogue Consortium



THE POWER
OF DIALOGUE
CONSORTIUM

The Power of Dialogue Consortium focuses on empowering women, youth, and other marginalized groups to effectively influence and participate in political processes, helping build more sustainable and inclusive societies.

We invite you to explore the stories of changemakers from around the world who are currently working to build more sustainable and inclusive democracies in their own countries, defining and reimagining what democracy means in their own communities.

Thank you,
The Members of the Power of Dialogue Consortium

Consortium members: Akina Mama wa Africa (AMWA), the Centre des Études Méditerranéennes Internationales (CEMI), the Gorée Institute, and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy.

Illustrations by Tonke Koppelaar
Editing and document design by Louise ten Bosch

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs



RAHMA'S STORY

Hello everyone,

I stand before you as a family medicine resident and a proud alumna of CEMI — a leadership school that did more than train me. It transformed how I see responsibility, courage, and change.

CEMI (Civil Engagement and Leadership Initiative) is a leadership and civic engagement program that equips young professionals with practical skills in strategic thinking, advocacy, policy design, and ethical leadership. It brings together individuals committed to improving public systems — not from the outside, but from within.

Over the past three years, CEMI became my compass. It pushed me to move from observation to action, from frustration to responsibility. Today, I coordinate multiple hospital units in one of Tunisia's largest public hospitals — a role I stepped into not because it was easy, but because it was necessary.

Through this journey, I learned that digital transformation in healthcare is not a luxury. It is a matter of justice, efficiency, and dignity. Introducing digital tools improved patient follow-up, coordination among professionals, and accountability — small structural changes with human impact.

In my work, I also focused on occupational health and women's well-being, introducing validated tools to assess how workplace conditions affect sexual health.

For many women in underserved regions, this was the first time such topics were addressed openly within a medical setting — breaking silence where it had long been normalized.

During my participation in the Tunisian School of Politics, I developed a policy paper on the digitalization of Tunisia's public health system. It proposed a realistic roadmap for integrating digital systems at the primary care level. Seeing ideas developed in an educational space later resonate at the national level reaffirmed my belief that when research, advocacy, and courage align, systems can move.

But progress is never linear.

At one point in my residency, I was assigned to a department where resistance to change was overwhelming. Fear of transparency, accountability, and digitalization created an environment where dysfunction became normalized. When I spoke up through official channels, I faced harassment and threats. I was afraid — but I did not stay silent.

CEMI taught me that leadership is not the absence of fear; it is the decision to act despite it.

I documented what I observed and reported it through formal institutional pathways. It took time, and it took courage. But eventually, change followed. Infrastructure was improved, systems were put in place, and a process of transformation began. That moment confirmed something essential to me: persistence matters, even when the cost feels personal.

Today in Tunisia, especially after July 25, civic space has narrowed. The shift toward authoritarianism weighs heavily on activists, particularly women. We are often told to be quiet, to stay safe, to step back.

But we refuse.

Because when civic space shrinks, activism becomes an act of survival — and of love for our country.

As women, as doctors, and as citizens, we are not only healers of bodies. We are defenders of dignity, builders of accountability, and voices for those who are silenced. Our participation in public life is not optional — it is essential.

To every woman who persists despite fear: you are not alone. Change often begins with one voice, one act of courage, one refusal to accept what is unjust. That single act can spark transformation — in a department, a hospital, a community, and one day, a nation.

Thank you, CEMI, for teaching us that even in rigid systems, light is not found — it is created.

**WATCH THE RETELLING OF
RAHMA'S STORY IN
ANIMATION [HERE](#).**



CHANGE OFTEN BEGINS WITH ONE VOICE, ONE ACT OF COURAGE, ONE REFUSAL TO ACCEPT WHAT IS UNJUST. - RAHMA





JACOB'S STORY

My name is Jacob Eyeru and I have been serving as the elected Chairperson of the National Youth Council (NYC) of Uganda for the term 2020 to 2025. The NYC is the statutory body legally mandated with representation of all the youth of Uganda in the governance of the country. The law requiring the NYC to act as a non-partisan institution in pursuit of youth interests.

During the first year of my tenure of office, I noticed that while Uganda had multiple political parties with representation in parliament, the youth leaders elected to leadership in the NYC were largely from only the ruling political party, constituting about 97% of all membership. This outcome of elections was a result of a patronage system employed by the ruling party during youth elections that makes it extremely difficult for opposition political parties to field enough candidates or have a fair chance of winning youth elections to join the NYC Leadership.

This result meant that the NYC's intended purpose of representing all young people in Uganda was always compromised because most opposition political party youth leaders felt dissociated from any decisions taken by a youth council meeting almost entirely synonymous with a gathering of ruling party youth members. They also didn't agree to participate in activities organized by the council because they feared the attendance at such events would largely be monopolised by the ruling party. Events such as commemoration of the International Youth Day, which are intended to be inclusive, always leaned so heavily towards youth from the ruling NRM party, resulting in the disgust of others and failure of meaningful representation of all youth by the NYC. Many of the opposition political party youth leaders

perceived national youth events as politically biased they mutually associated participation in such events with a declaration of support for the ruling party.

This situation was not helped by a polarised political climate in Uganda that fostered intolerance and division among youth from different political parties. As a result, youth from different political backgrounds were marginalized, hindering genuine dialogue and collaboration among young people in the country .

In practice therefore, the NYC had over the years become an extension of the ruling party youth wing, sometimes causing further political polarization themselves, having not had the opportunity to listen to the alternative wisdom of divergent political narrative. As opposed to being the institution of consensus building for a joint multi-partisan youth agenda as legally mandated, the NYC had steadily become the mirror image of a single party system. In this context, while the national youth council operated at local, regional, and national levels in Uganda, the divisions caused by political affiliations hindered any real effective engagement of the present dissenting political views from the youth in the country.

WHAT HAPPENED?

In 2023, I approached NIMD to do a few training sessions of elected NYC leaders on the Multi-party system and how it should work as a way of curbing the single party mindset of the elected leaders. During the course of these trainings, NIMD Uganda offered to host a consultative session between our NYC leadership and representatives of political party youth wings to review the operational framework of multi-partism among youth political institutions.

That consultation, facilitated by NIMD, resolved to form a Multi-party Youth Forum (MYF) comprising of youth leaders from the political parties with representation in Parliament and to include the National Youth council, the Uganda National Students Association and the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs. Essentially, the MYF was formed to as a platform for constructive equity in youth participation that would allow heavily under

-represented political party youth leaders have a meaningful engagement channel in the national youth governance architecture for a healthy democracy.

The platform brought different youth leaders of political parties together to work together and redefine the role of youth in the politics of Uganda as a means of facilitating constructive dialogue among young leaders. NIMD thereafter undertook several capacity building sessions for the membership and leadership of the MYF to appreciate political organization and the responsibility of agreeing to some minimum joint positions for a functional Multi-party dispensation in our country. The capacity building session also helped in building a culture of understanding principled political dissent and learning methods of resolving political polarization in multiparty institutions.

AFTER THE CHANGE

Today, thanks to the formation of the MYF, we now have a framework for participation of diverse political party youth leaders in national fora without the feeling that they are being coerced into association with the ruling party. To maintain a cordial working relationship, decisions of the MYF are taken by a consensus building approach rather than a simple majority vote, this has helped to keep the polarization afar and grow the trust between political parties participating in MYF.

Through the MYF and thanks to the Power of Dialogue programs, we took advantage of the Multiparty framework to also train young women politicians as a way of addressing the growing gender disparity in participation too.

Over the years, mobilising the youth from other political parties to be part of national youth engagements has gone deeper to diffuse tensions that used to exist between young people of different political parties. Together with the MYF team, we have mobilised over 1000 youth from different political parties in the five regions of Uganda to call for peaceful participation in the electoral processes. These youth from different parties have come together and signed commitments to preserve and pursue a peaceful election despite the different party belongings.



**WATCH THE RETELLING OF OUR
CHANGEMAKERS STORIES HERE.**



ZEINA'S STORY

My name is Zeinabou Walet Mohamed Ali, and my commitment is rooted in a fundamental refusal to accept a reality where girls in my country are denied a better future. This is how it started and with our Alliance of Young Leaders for Peace and Stability in the Sahel, I decided to transform this outrage into tangible action. In addition to that as a certified facilitator in political leadership and conflict prevention, trained through the Power of Dialogue programme, I have personally trained over a hundred young leaders from Timbuktu to across Mali, equipping them with the tools to influence their communities.

Our alliance is a network of 100 young leaders from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal, and this alliance was created through through the Gorée Institute's Youth academy leadership programme, of which the first cohort was launched in 2022. Our mission is to especially advocate for greater participation of youth and women, pushing our region toward more peaceful and inclusive democratic governance.

So today, this work takes on its full meaning through my role as Regional Coordinator. I work to synergize our efforts by influencing country directors in Senegal, Mali and Niger, and Burkina Faso. My goal is to foster a unified front that exerts greater pressure on public policies regarding the political participation of women and youth throughout the Sahel.

A key achievement of our Alliance lies in training its members to become trainers in Political Leadership and Electoral Conflict Prevention. So far, our members have

trained 400 young leaders and women on political leadership as well as onelectoral conflict prevention across the region. We are now a key partner in major advocacy spaces, including the Gorée Institute's Regional Youth Forum. This annual event offers members a unique opportunity to directly engage with decision-makers on the real needs of young people and the challenges they face in participating in governance mechanisms. And this is very important to us, this is where we can advocate for a meaningful participation of youth and women in the decision making processes. Several members of the Alliance participated and contributed their expertise to the National Consultations on the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda. And we even have our own Simone Diouf as a representative on the continental level. She serves as the African Union Youth Ambassador for Peace for West Africa, working directly on issues of peace and security.

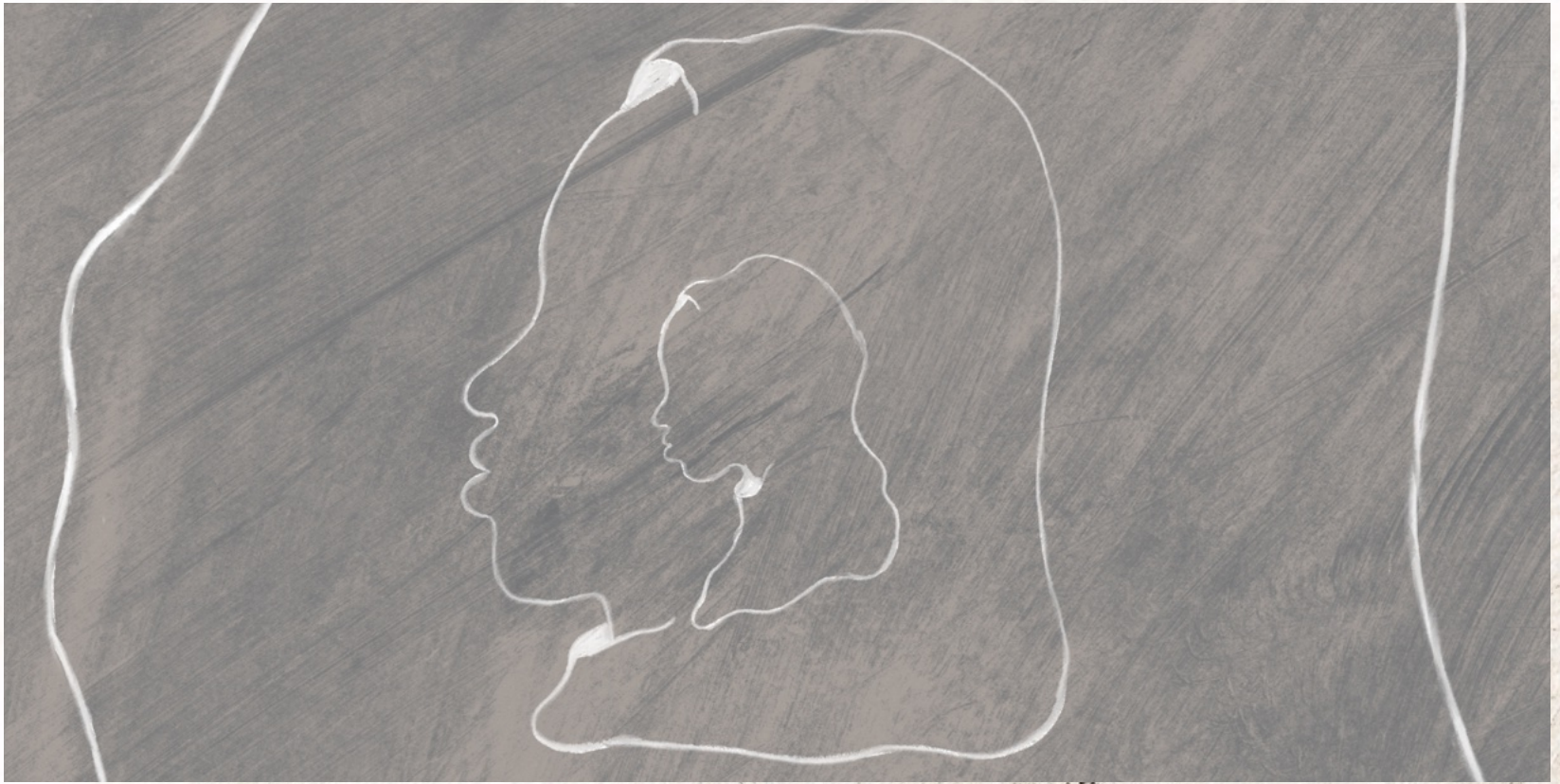
Apart from the in-person work, our Alliance also hosts online spaces for more in-depth capacity-building on specific thematic topics. These sessions have been on the role of youth in preventing violent extremism, leveraging technological tools to increase the positive presence of women online, and challenges women's participation in governance and the electoral process. Our success lies in its structure, the ambitious goals, and the consolidation of initiatives by the alumni ensuring sustained impact.

For us, capacity-building is a sure bet, while networking is essential for sharing experiences and creating synergies. We realized that harnessing the potential of young people is the cornerstone of any sustainable transformation. Our Alliance is not an end-goal in itself, but a starting point. Our aim is to expand to other countries, partner up with other network and organisations and look forward to dive into civic technological projects. I am very deeply convinced that empowering these groups with the right skills is the only path toward achieving sustainable, inclusive, and transparent governance in our region.

WATCH THE RETELLING OF ZEINA'S STORY IN [ANIMATION HERE.](#)







SARAH'S STORY

Sarah's story begins in 2021, in the aftermath of the General Elections. At the time, she was the Vice President of the Women's League of the Democratic Party In Uganda. Only four years later, her journey led her to become the President of the League and later the Spokesperson of the Interparty Women's Platform (IWOP).

After General Elections, a group of women met with the former President of the Women's League of the Democratic Party to reflect on their campaign experiences. What started as a post-election conversation quickly revealed a troubling pattern. Women, particularly those in opposition parties, spoke openly about the harassment they faced during the campaigns. They described intimidation, verbal attacks, and deliberate efforts to silence their voices, leaving many unsure of how to respond. The women realized that these shared experiences were not isolated incidents, but symptoms of a broader challenge facing women in political spaces. What was needed was solidarity, courage, and a new way of working together.

Women were not being heard in political participation in Uganda, particularly due to cultural barriers. Even though affirmative action was implemented, women were not truly contesting. If they were, they faced harassment. At the same time, women were still dying in child birth, leading to an additional stress barrier. Sarah noticed that in their youth league many girls left politics due to sexual harassment.

The women politicians also observed how young people were successfully joining forces across party lines. Through the Multiparty Youth Forum, supported by

NIMD, young leaders were coming together to openly discuss shared challenges and work collectively toward solutions. This raised a powerful question among the women: if young people could set aside political differences to collaborate and protect one another, why couldn't women do the same? That question would soon become the spark for a new way of organizing.

When the women came together, a powerful realization emerged: what united them was not political ideology, but their shared identity as women. The challenges they faced—harassment, intimidation, and exclusion—cut across party lines, and no single political party could address them alone. Acting alone had limited their reach; speaking together would amplify their voices. They made a choice to create a safe and inclusive space where female politicians could come together, stand in solidarity, and work collectively despite their political differences. That decision marked the beginning of the Interparty Women's Platform (IWOP).

Founded in 2021, IWOP was built on the shared commitment to unity, crossing political differences to increase solidarity among women in politics. A bold idea transformed in a coalition of ten registered political parties. The journey was not easy, but the women were not alone. Early in the process, Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA) stepped in to support the initiation of the IWOP platform, enabling it to take its first steps and bring together women from across the political spectrum.

Dialogue has always been at the heart of IWOP's work. Drawing on dialogue-based approaches, the platform has used inclusive discussion as both a method and a tool for collective action. IWOP has trained female candidates at all levels in politics. As a result, all political parties represented within IWOP have ratified the National Gender Policy as a guiding framework, an initiative first introduced by Sarah's Democratic Party and later embraced by all member parties.

The approach is similar to the parallel platform Multiparty Youth Forum (MYF) and the initiatives also amplify one another's work, as they are both founded in the principle of dialogue. MYF

and IWOP often stand together, as this makes them stronger than standing alone.

The alignment and collaboration between IWOP and MYF is one of the strengths of the PoD consortium, as AMWA and NIMD have collaborated to enhance and shape youth and women's political participation in Uganda by supporting these platforms. They have contributed to spaces for learning and dialogue, as well as capacity building for the members of both IWOP and MYF. An example of this close collaboration is the inaugural National Youth Symposium and the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI), a leadership platform for female politicians.

As a result of sustained advocacy by IWOP, political parties committed to allocating at least one-third of their leadership positions to women. IWOP-aligned Women's League leaders, supported by NIMD, engaged in strategic dialogue with the Secretaries General of political parties to advance this commitment. To address harassment in political spaces, IWOP member parties also developed and adopted sexual harassment policies, creating safer environments that enable women to speak and participate freely.

On Friday 24th October, the leaving Chairperson handed over to the next party. This is not just a symbol of an ordinary handover, but a clear message to Uganda that change is vital, and it must happen. Among the achievements, women leaders joined the Uganda Women's Network through IWOP in formulating and passing the National Women's Manifesto (2026-2031), titled "Her Voice". The manifesto captures critical issues such as Human Capital Development, Social Norms and Gender-based Violence, Livelihood and Climate Justice, and finally Women in ICT. Through engagement with the Electoral Commission, joint press conferences, and meetings with various embassies in Uganda, IWOP amplified women's voices and strengthened their collective influence in the political landscape.

IWOP HAD FOUND SUCCESS DUE TO SEVERAL FACTORS:

- The political leaders showed political willingness to accept and/or even embrace IWOP. Their political willingness was key. Without it, nothing would have happened.
- Women politicians were able to step over their political differences, accept and unite. This profound unity was an enabler for the IWOP process.
- The women's leagues of the political parties had stable leaders, who were able to carry IWOP process forward.
- The constitution of Uganda gives women the freedom of association and expression. With all its flaws, women in Uganda were to unite, organize and speak freely among one another.
- Partners were available and ready to support the processes of IWOP. Not only AmWa and NIMD, but also women's movements played a crucial role. If these partners had not been ready to jump in when the opportunity arose, it would not have materialized.

Important steps have been made, but the journey is far from complete. Some political parties are not on board yet, such as the NUP. The coordination and collaboration between the Uganda Parliamentary Women's Association (UWOPA) and IWOP has been minimal. There is huge potential for joint advocacy, as UWOPA brings the angle of parliamentarians. This sometimes creates missed opportunities. Much as NIMD has a Democracy academy for the youths, that alone is not enough, Uganda needs a youth-female-led Democracy Academy to nurture girls and women to fight patriarchy.

Power struggles within political parties still affects women. When you have men struggling for power, it affects women's political participation. As much as we have the policies on board, some political parties are not able to attain the percentage of women's position. If you have very few women, this is a chal-

lenge. Capacity-building of women. There is something missing with women in parliament.

For Sarah, change must also extend beyond national borders. She believes that uniting women across political parties is a model that can be adopted across Africa. There is significant opportunity to deepen regional learning and cooperation to advance women's inclusion within political institutions.

Through IWOP, Sarah has seen both herself and other women take stronger, more confident positions within their parties. In just a few years, this progress has strengthened her belief that women are not only capable of leadership, but essential to shaping more inclusive, democratic futures.



JASSER'S STORY

My story begins in Hammamet, my hometown, where a few classmates and I founded a small youth citizenship club called Nefaal.

We were just teenagers who wanted to make a difference — even if we didn't yet know the rules of the game. We organized local debates, volunteered in our community, and believed that civic engagement was not a privilege, but a duty. Within a year, that little club grew into an organization — a real space where ideas turned into action. That's where everything started.

When it came time to choose my studies, I followed what I believed in. I left Hammamet for Tunis and joined the Faculty of Legal, Political and Social Sciences — a place known for its history of political debate and thought. I chose law not to work in an office, but to understand how justice is built, how power is shaped, and how freedom can be protected.

By the age of 20, I was already debating on national television about democracy. I said then:

“Our country is on the right path because we are building a democratic society — but we must protect it so it doesn't disappear.”

My voice began to travel beyond borders. I was featured in ARTE's documentary on Tunisia and on the front page of Aftenposten, one of Norway's biggest newspapers. But I soon realized something essential: passion alone is not enough to create change.

To transform ideas into results, we need knowledge, tools, and strategy. While reading about political science, one word changed my direction — policy.

It opened a new world to me: the world of public policy, where ideas become systems and systems create real change. That's when I joined the Tunisian School of Politics (TSOP), organized by CEMI.

Everything clicked.

At TSOP, I met people who shared my belief that democracy is not a dream — it's a daily practice. I graduated among the top eight of my class. TSOP gave me frameworks, a deeper understanding of policymaking, and a sense of purpose. It didn't just teach me — it transformed me.

It turned conviction into clarity, and clarity into action. Soon after, I represented Tunisia within the Tunisian School of Politics programme at the World Forum for Democracy in Strasbourg — from Hammamet's streets to the halls of the Council of Europe.

There, I spoke about Palestine, justice, and our generation's responsibility to defend freedom. The video of that speech reached over a million views across social media.

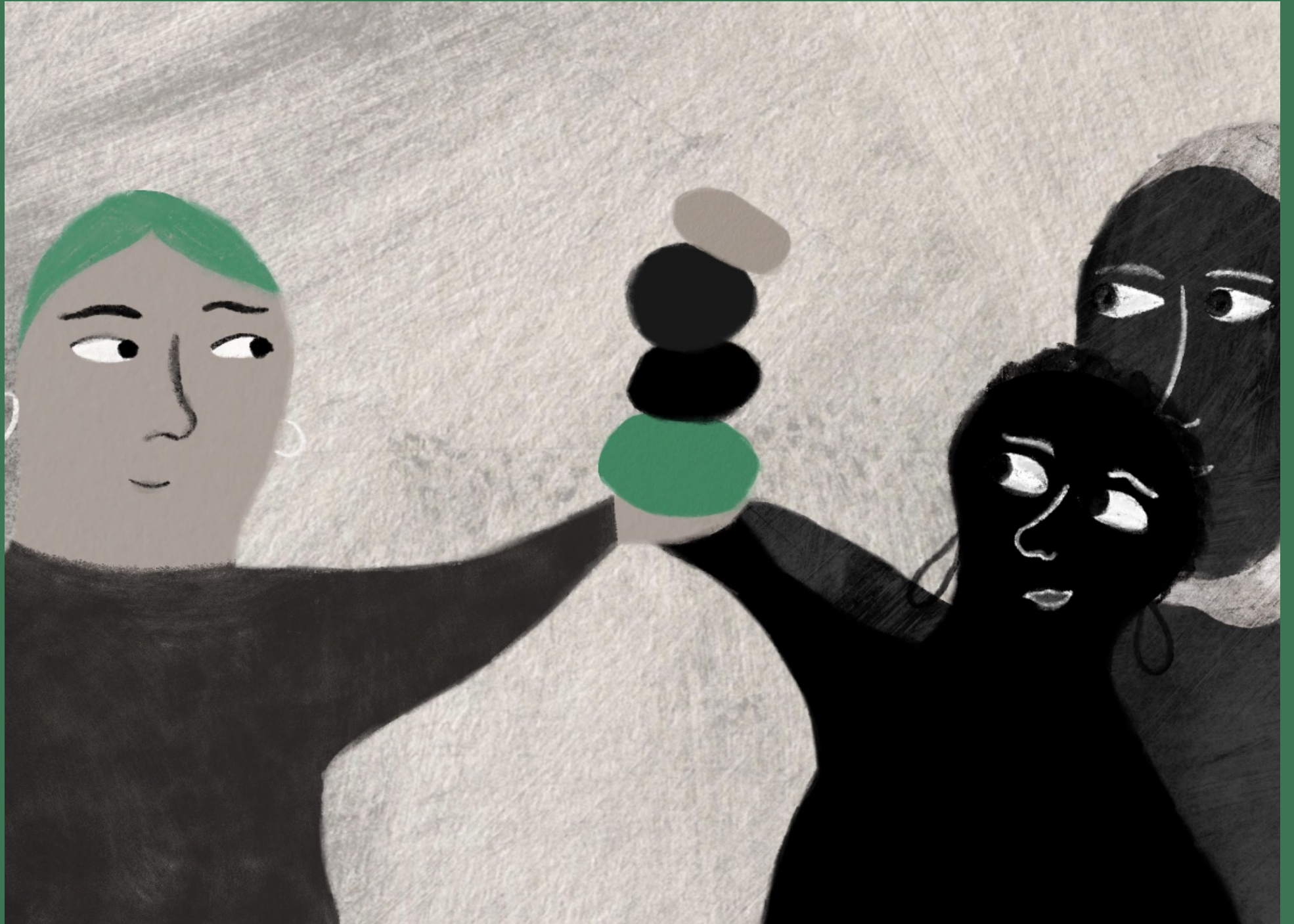
But more important than numbers was the message: a Tunisian youth voice could reach the world. When I came back home, I wanted continuity, not applause.

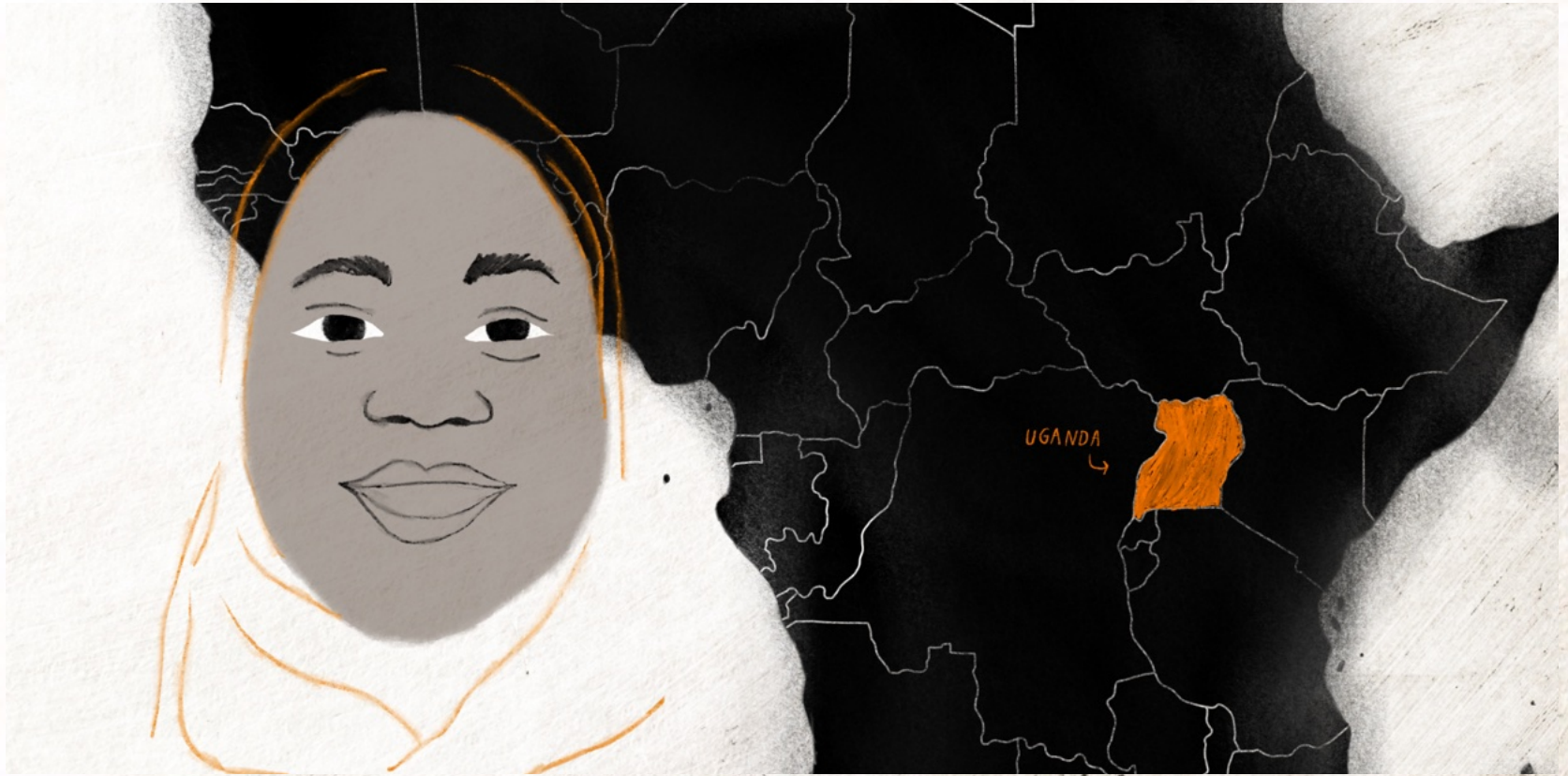
I founded the Public Policy Club at my faculty and launched the Public Policy Programme within Nefaal. I even encouraged my vice-president to join TSOP — because I had learned that when knowledge meets values, change becomes possible. Later, I became a radio commentator on SonFM, a TEDx speaker, a podcast host, and a panel moderator — always aiming to turn complex politics into accessible, citizen-centered conversations. This also includes my participation in Freesh podcasts. In 2024, I was honored as Tunisia's 2nd Outstanding Youth (JCI) in Political, Legal, and Governmental Affairs.

But my proudest moment came when democracy itself was at risk. I initiated the first joint communiqué of law students — soon followed by over 1,000 others — standing up against authoritarianism and for democracy. It wasn't just a protest; it was a declaration of faith in our country's future.

From a high school club to an international forum, from passion to structured action, my journey taught me one lesson: When knowledge meets hope, and values meet courage — change becomes real.

I am Jasser Riahi — a law student, activist, and believer in the power of knowledge to shape the democratic future we all deserve.





AISHA'S STORY

My political journey began in 2011. When I stepped into elective politics in 2016 through the Democratic Party (DP), I contested for the Kalungu District Woman MP seat. The elections were rigged. As I filed petitions to the High Court and later to the Court of Appeal, justice was never served. Throughout this process, I received no support from my political party. Even now, I know that if DP had stood with me, I would have won that election or at least the appeal. Struggling through lonely battles opened my eyes to many other women, especially within my own party, who were facing the same struggles.

That realisation lit a fire in me. Since 2016, I have been thinking deeply about how we could create spaces where women can meaningfully and safely participate in politics. The dream of what would later become the Inter-Party Women's Platform (IWOP) grew stronger after I attended the African Women's Leadership Institute (AWLI) in 2021. The experience was different; AMwA's approach touched both my mind and heart. Unlike other trainings, AWLI required every participant to return home and create a community action project, and AMwA promised to walk with us through it.

When I shared my idea to create something that could support women across political parties, it was still just a seed. AMwA saw its potential and nurtured it. My teaching background and the memories of young girls in schools struggling with little to no support stayed with me. I entered politics carrying that same conviction: that no woman should ever have to walk alone.

In Uganda, most political parties remain male-dominated. Women's concerns are often pushed aside in favour of party interests. It was clear that as women in politics, we needed to come together across party lines to speak and act for ourselves. I remember our first AMwA engagement vividly. We went to the African Women's Leadership Institute as women from different parties, and one of our first principles was mutual respect for every woman's opinion. That meeting shifted something in us. We began to see that our shared experiences as women mattered more than our political colours.

The idea of IWOP took shape: women's councils as nurseries for young women leaders, and women's leagues as entry points into the political space. Building this was not easy. Engaging political parties meant stepping into guarded spaces, as they were protective of their independence, power, and resources. Yet through dialogue, patience, and persistence, and with the support of partners like AMwA, NIMD Uganda, the Women's International Peace Centre, the Eminent Women of the Women's Situation Room, and the Ministry of Justice, IWOP was born.

What I celebrate most about IWOP is its spirit of dialogue and consensus. Convincing ten political parties to sit at one table was no small feat, but we did it. With AMwA's hands-on support, from drafting the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to guiding our consultations, IWOP was officially launched in 2023. The MOU introduced a six-month rotational leadership model, allowing every woman leader to gain leadership experience. It was also a quiet statement to our country: that peaceful transfer of power is possible, even in our political spaces.

Before IWOP, women leaders were often invited to events but excluded from decision-making; with IWOP active, that changed. Women began leading, speaking, and shaping decisions that affect their lives.

When I became the President of the DP Women's League, I made it my mission to make political parties safe and inclusive spaces for women. My first task was to develop a Gender Policy that introduced quotas for women's representation. Before that,

the National Executive Committee had 52 members, and only 4 were women. We changed that. We even included a clause that every party function must have both male and female MCs. For years, women were called only to usher or serve. We changed that narrative.

Next, I worked on a policy against sexual harassment, the first of its kind in any political party in Uganda. The policy outlined reporting mechanisms and penalties for perpetrators. It faced strong resistance, but a few parties, the Forum of Democratic Change, the Alliance for National Transformation, and the Uganda People's Congress adopted it. Today, some parties have monitoring committees to oversee the implementation of these gender and anti-harassment policies. These may seem like small steps, but they are milestones on the road to gender-just political spaces.

AMwA stood with us throughout this journey. With the support of IWOP, members participated in the Coady Institute's Feminist Decolonial Transformational Leadership Training in Arusha in 2024. From that, IWOP leaders convened a learning space for 30 women from the steering and summit committees. We also held a consultative meeting with 10 party Secretary Generals, who later signed commitments to form IWOP regional structures and increase their annual contributions to sustain our work.

Slowly, the language within political parties began to shift, from "party first" to women. Women began supporting each other across party lines, developing shared messages around health, education, and economic empowerment. They are now more confident, more visible, and more united. IWOP's advocacy has increased the number of women in leadership positions and emboldened more women to contest for elective office alongside men.

Yet challenges remain. Stereotypes still hold women back, confining them to lower-level or affirmative action positions. But our resolve stands firm. IWOP continues to grow, rooted in dialogue, solidarity, and feminist leadership.

Even as the Power of Dialogue programme ends, our spirit remains unshaken. IWOP is now working toward sustainability through savings and plans to host a secretariat within a political party. Many partners have since closed their projects, but we still hold faith in AMWA's sisterhood and commitment. This baby was born from collective labour, and we will nurture her until she grows strong.

IWOP is not just a platform; it is a movement of women in political leadership, joining hands across divides to transform politics in Uganda and beyond.

**WATCH THE RETELLING OF
AISHA'S STORY IN
ANIMATION [HERE](#).**





DIBABE'S STORY

After participating in the AWLI in June 2022, I had a change in mindset. I had a clear understanding of what feminism is. My perception of feminism changed, viewing it as a theory about equality and human rights, especially for marginalized women and persons with disabilities.” — Dibabe Bacha, General Manager, Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA)

When Dibabe Bacha returned from the African Women’s Leadership Institute (AWLI) in June 2022, the shift she experienced internally would go on to cause ripples of positive change throughout the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA), a movement of over 12,590 women united in the struggle for dignity, equality, and justice.

EWDNA works with women across different disability categories: women with intellectual disabilities, those navigating literacy challenges, and those with visual, hearing, or mobility impairments. Their mission is to empower women with disabilities economically, socially, and politically, and to ensure their voices shape decisions that affect their lives. Through capacity building, psychosocial support, economic empowerment, student sponsorship, advocacy and lobbying, peace-building, humanitarian response, and climate justice, EWDNA is redefining what inclusive feminist leadership looks like in Ethiopia.

EWDNA sits at the heart of national and regional advocacy spaces with 11 established branches and active membership in both women’s and disability networks. The association holds leadership positions including vice presidency at the

National Council for Civil Society and continues to raise its voice in global forums for women and persons with disabilities.

“We are advocating for our identity, both our gender and our disability,” Dibabe affirms proudly.

After the AWLI, Dibabe took the feminist approaches and strategies home. Her first action was to organise internal Feminist and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) trainings for 42 staff members, youth council representatives, and board members of EWDNA. The transformation was visible, many began to proudly identify as feminists, grounding their work in feminist principles and politics.

EWDNA then convened a high-level advocacy workshop to strengthen policymakers’ understanding and commitment to disability-inclusive programming. The workshop brought together women caucus leaders, members of the Addis Ababa City Parliament, and social issue committee leaders. Discussions on Sexual and Reproductive Health accessibility and legal rights of women with disabilities set in motion a shift in the systems within Ethiopia. In the pipeline are plans for a Disability Caucus in Parliament alongside the Gender Caucus, and the introduction of sign language services for women with hearing impairments.

Through continued advocacy and awareness training, EWDNA influenced city and national leaders to include women and youth with disabilities in policy formulation and service delivery. These efforts have resulted in concrete wins, from sign language interpreters in public offices to transportation support for wheelchair users. “Inclusion is now seen as a right, not charity,” Dibabe says, her voice steady with pride.

But the impact goes beyond EWDNA to other organisations. “Each time we receive a grant, whether big or small, the effort and passion applied are the same.”

She credits EWDNA’s progress to a blend of training, finance, networking, and partnerships, describing the 2022 AWLI as the engine that revved up new possibilities for feminist organizing

within the association. “I would like to thank AMWA for creating that space for me and nurturing my feminist journey,” she reflects. Financial support from AMWA, coupled with sisterhood and solidarity across the continent, she says, helped EWDNA move from vision to action.

Today, EWDNA stands as a beacon for practical and meaningful inclusion, not tokenism. “Each time we receive a grant, whether big or small, the effort and passion we apply are the same,” Dibabe notes.

With these wins, Diababe believes that more can be done. She dreams of more spaces for experience sharing and recognition of women with disabilities as consultants, advisors, and storytellers in feminist movements.

Her hope for the future is rooted in continuity, sustaining the work of empowering women with disabilities, pushing for inclusive policies, and ensuring that women, youth, and children with disabilities are not left behind.

“As a feminist organization, we believe tomorrow can be better than today,” she says. “We must stay persistent in our advocacy to achieve meaningful participation and inclusive policies for all.”





NANA'S STORY

Espaces Djemu, which means 'meeting places' in English, is a forum for exchange created by alumni of the Thomas Sankara Promotion of the Political and Democratic Schools (EPD) of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) Mali.

NANA SALAMA, LEADER OF THE DJEMU SPACES

Nana Salama Maiga, one of the founding alumni of this initiative, has been actively involved in community organisations in her neighbourhood (Club des patriotes) and at secondary school (anti-AIDS club) since the age of 15. Since then, she has been actively working to promote civic education in Mali, believing that this is necessary in the Malian context to maintain good governance.

A network and IT systems engineer, she has 10 years of professional experience with African regional groups and organisations.

Despite her professional obligations, her civic engagement has remained strong. In 2021, she joined the first democratic school of NIMD Mali to deepen her knowledge and acquire new skills in values and governance. This training gave rise to the "Espaces Djemu" project, which she is carrying out with her classmates from the same year. In the project team, she is nicknamed "Big Sister" for her role in assisting all members, her rigorous follow-up and her quick mind, which she uses to make concrete and relevant proposals. Nana's qualities have greatly contributed to the creation of this space, which aims to inform, train and share experiences

with young high school and university students aged 14 to 35 on citizen participation in local governance.

BIRTH AND AMBITIONS OF A FRAMEWORK THAT HAS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE

The project, which was launched in 2022, benefited from the support of the Power of Dialogue (PoD) consortium. Since then, working sessions between NIMD (a member of the consortium) and the beneficiary project leaders have enabled the project documents to be finalised. "This collaboration, which goes beyond funding, is a real school of project management based on human values and the transfer of skills focused on rigour and analytical skills," according to Mahamane Baba TANDINA, a member of the project team.

"Les Espaces Djemu" aims to create a framework for exchanges between alumni, experts and young people (high school and university students) to promote democracy, civic engagement and good citizenship. Since its launch, the project has held four (04) annual editions. Each edition includes three to four activities. The first three editions focused mainly on forums for exchange in high schools and universities in Bamako, reaching nearly 1,166 direct participants (with a special edition dedicated to International Democracy Day, celebrated on 15 September 2024, bringing together more than 300 participants). Each time, these forums provided an opportunity to discuss a theme related to youth engagement, their role as guardians of democracy and the values of Mali. The activities included several training sessions on active citizenship, the political history of Mali and social change. Several digital campaigns (#lademocratieselonmoi; #lamairieselonmoi) were launched to raise awareness about democracy through the NIMD comic strip 'L'élue' (The Elected Representative). An immersion programme in the form of practical internships for young high school students in their local town halls was also carried out. It should be noted that the case study focused on the 2025 edition, which combined several elements: immersion, exchanges and a digital campaign.

BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH INNOVATIVE METHODS

"This project is an innovation in terms of training young students in active citizenship," according to the Secretary General of the town hall of commune 4. The approach of targeting high schools and universities is innovative because this category of citizens, although future voters, do not feel concerned by issues of civic and community engagement. Indeed, as studies show, schools and universities in Mali are depoliticised. This group is often exploited in socio-political demonstrations and protests.

However, it is important to raise their awareness of governance and democracy issues by giving them the tools to better deconstruct clichés about democracy on the one hand, and to actively participate in local governance on the other. The young people's practical internship at the town hall was preceded by several coaching sessions led by Dalla, Issouf and myself, all members of the project team. The aim was to assess the young people's knowledge before and after the internship and to establish a framework for direct discussion on the internship itself and issues related to local governance. This initiative is important not only for young Malians but also for the alumni, as it has strengthened cohesion within the group and increased autonomy in project management and monitoring. This fourth edition, through the immersion of young people in town halls, has generated a lot of enthusiasm among high school students and town hall officials.

According to Fatouma Diarra, a beneficiary of the practical internship, "The involvement of young people in political life is essential for the future of the country." Rokiatou Nayété believes that "We should continue to carry out this type of project and continue to help young high school students to learn.

The impact goes beyond the people we have reached. The initiative has made it possible to scale up activities and extend their reach beyond Bamako. Examples include the CCRM (Citizens' Collective for the Rebirth of Mali), Democracy Tech Squad, and CUDH (University Human Rights Club).

SUCCESS FACTORS

The success of the Djemu spaces is based on several pillars. First, it effectively targets young people, a strategic demographic majority. A dynamic, versatile project team open to collaboration with other civil society actors ensures excellent execution. The small group format of 35 people promotes high-quality learning about governance and citizenship, enriched by credible and diverse speakers and bilingual facilitation (Bambara and French). Finally, digital mobilisation relayed by influencers, bloggers and the participants themselves has created a lasting impact.

KEY FIGURES

- The digital campaign “#LaMairieSelonMoi” (The Town Hall According to Me), launched on 6 July 2025, mobilised 60 young people and was a real success with a cumulative reach of over 46,000 views, thus helping to strengthen online citizen expression.
- This initiative, which was part of the fourth edition of the project, directly reached 200 young people. An immersion phase enabled five students to get involved in five town halls in the Bamako district from 11 to 16 May 2025. Their experiences were shared during a feedback session on 29 May, attended by 107 students. Previously, in Koulikoro, 35 young people were trained and 87 participants, 70% of whom were girls, took part in the Djemu forum.
- The digital campaign achieved tangible results: more than 50,000 views in total, 4,400 interactions, a gain of 263 followers and an audience composed of 31% women and 69% men.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The improvement of project team members’ skills in drafting project documents.
- The need to extend the Djemu Spaces to other regions of Mali.
- The need to move towards a more formal structure (legal cre-

ation of Espaces Djemu).

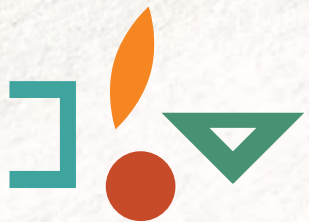
- The five-day framework limits in-depth study and access to decision-makers, which can sometimes be difficult.
- Continuing education needs: public speaking, critical analysis, civic and political culture.
- Decisive contribution from The Power of Dialogue (PoD) consortium

[Find out more about Espaces Djemu and its impact here.](#)

The consortium played a decisive role by providing both technical and financial support and facilitating valuable connections between Les Espaces DJEMU and other partners. This networking enabled DJEMU members to benefit from the expertise of renowned centres such as CEMI in Tunisia and the Gorée Institute in Senegal. Building on these achievements, the consortium values and wishes to share the successes of the DJEMU model with donors. Buoyed by already significant progress, the Espaces Djemu collective now has strong ambitions for further development. Its work, which places active citizenship at the heart of its mission, is one of the keys to Mali’s future. Such a commitment is not only necessary but also deserves unwavering support. This chapter should not be the end but the beginning of an even greater story.

WATCH THE RETELLING OF NANA’S STORY IN ANIMATION [HERE.](#)

Upon the closing of the Power of Dialogue programme in 2025, the consortium will continue its work under the North East West (NEW) Alliance. The partners remain steadfast in their commitment to influence and drive transformative change that is inclusive and responsive to the aspirations of African people. They are committed to continuing to work collaboratively with partners, women and youth groups across the continent as agents of change united in a common cause, that of democratic governance that transforms lives and allows space for women and young people's participation.



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