

WYDE

Civic Engagement

TRANSLATING THE ROADMAP TO RESULTS



A **Youth** Advocacy Toolkit for Political Participation in East Africa

IMPLEMENTED BY:

Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy



WFD



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Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy

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The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy works to promote peaceful, just and inclusive politics worldwide. NIMD's approach is characterized by dialogue, which it facilitates for actors across the political spectrum at the local, national and regional level.

This toolkit supports Youth Ambassadors, youth in political parties and youth-led organizations, and National Working Group focal points in advancing the Roadmap for Enhancing Youth Political Participation in East Africa.

It helps turn the Roadmap's vision into action by guiding youth actors to set priorities, develop advocacy strategies, engage decision-makers, mobilize support, and sustain efforts for meaningful, inclusive, and lasting youth participation in political life.



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01

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

The Toolkit was developed based on an important premise: young people are already active in politics. Across East Africa, they are organizing in parties, leading in communities, shaping public debate, mobilizing online, and pressing institutions to respond to their concerns. The challenge is not a lack of interest, commitment, or capability. The challenge is that political systems too often limit the ability of young people to influence decisions in meaningful and lasting ways. This toolkit is intended to help address that gap.

The guidance offered here is designed to be practical and flexible. It can be read from beginning to end, or used selectively depending on the stage of your advocacy effort. Some readers may turn to it when preparing for a meeting with party leaders or public officials. Others may use it to sharpen a reform ask, build a coalition, or think through how to follow up on commitments. The aim is not to prescribe a single model of action, but to offer a framework that can be adapted to different political contexts, institutional realities, and advocacy opportunities.

The Roadmap provides a shared direction. This toolkit is intended to help turn that direction into practical action.

USE THIS TOOLKIT WHEN YOU WANT TO:



02

THE ROADMAP IN PRACTICE:

What
youth are
advocating
for

The Roadmap for Enhancing Youth Political Participation in East Africa sets out a clear vision for more meaningful, inclusive, and sustained youth participation in political life. For youth advocates, the task is to translate that vision into practical reforms that political parties, civil society organizations, and institutions can adopt and implement.

The Roadmap therefore points youth advocates toward five broad areas for action: legal and policy reform, capacity and civic education, economic inclusion, safety and inclusive governance, and digital mobilization. In practice, this means advocating for fairer party rules, stronger mentoring and leadership pathways, lower financial barriers, safer and more inclusive participation, and forms of outreach that reflect how young people engage today.

These priorities are interconnected. Youth participation is strongest when young people are not only welcomed, but also supported, protected, heard, and given real opportunities to lead. The aim of advocacy is not symbolic inclusion. It is structural change.



03

MOVING FROM COMMITMENT TO CHANGE: A Practical Framework for Youth Advocacy

The advocacy framework outlined below guides youth advocates through four interconnected stages of action: Connect, Build, Influence, and Track. Each stage includes practical guidance on how to translate the Roadmap's strategic pillars into concrete advocacy action within regional and national political contexts.

CONNECT: Understand the context, challenges, and people involved

Strong advocacy starts with having clarity of the context, challenges, and relevant actors. Before developing an advocacy strategy, take time to understand:

1. What needs to change and why,
2. Who is affected, and
3. Who has the authority to solve the challenge (Identify decision-makers, potential allies, and likely blockers).

At this stage, anchor your challenge to one of the Roadmap's five strategic pillars; legal and policy reform, capacity and civic education, economic inclusion, safety and inclusive governance, or digital mobilization. Doing this strengthens the legitimacy of your advocacy as the Roadmap was developed, adopted, and validated regionally by youth and political actors from Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Somaliland and connects your effort to the broader regional agenda.

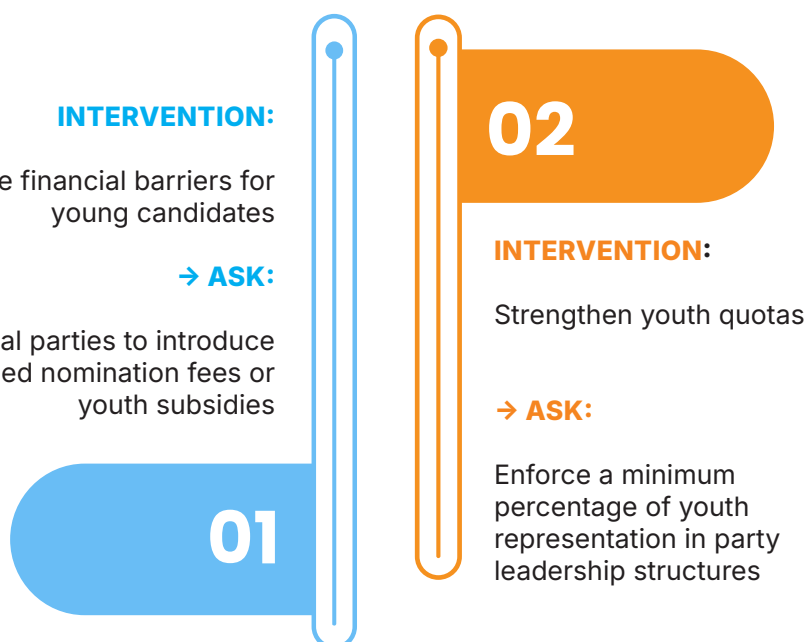
Example focus areas by pillar:

- i. Reducing nomination fees for youth seeking elective seats (Policy & Legal Reforms)
- ii. Expanding knowledge and mentorship programmes for youth in politics (Capacity Building)
- iii. Ensuring youth have access to campaign financing (Economic Empowerment)
- iv. Strengthening protections against political violence (Safety & Governance)
- v. Mobilizing youth through digital campaigns (Awareness & Partnerships)

BUILD: Turn your issue into a focused advocacy strategy

Move from stating issues to a concrete proposal. Define a clear, realistic, and specific reform ask directed at specific decision-makers and institutions. It is equally important to gather evidence that supports your case, and identify who has the power to act.

Using the Roadmap's key interventions as a guide, your ask should be actionable and measurable:



Your ask should be concrete, realistic, and directed at a specific decision-maker or institution. Once defined, build alliances. Map out who can support your effort, e.g., youth wings, civil society organizations, media, or reform champions or influencers, and bring them into a shared platform. Coalition-building at this stage strengthens both your legitimacy and your reach.

Frame your issue in a way that highlights its public value, its political benefit to decision-makers, and its alignment with democratic principles. Decision-makers are more likely to act when they can see the benefit to the communities they serve.

INFLUENCE: Engage decision-makers through the most effective channels available

With a clear ask and a coalition behind you, move to direct engagement. This could include dialogue meetings focusing on policy with party leaders or electoral bodies, written proposals, memoranda, position papers, public campaigns both online and offline, formal participation in public participation hearings or consultative processes, or joint coalition actions. Make a specific ask in every engagement, and tailor your message to your audience i.e., party leaders, electoral commissioners, and legislators, each have different incentives and concerns.

The Roadmap's pillars suggest different entry points for influence depending on your focus area:



POLICY & LEGAL REFORMS:

Engage electoral bodies and party leadership; present evidence on youth exclusion

→ Submit formal proposals through official channels



CAPACITY BUILDING:

Partner with civil society and non-governmental institutions; advocate for inclusion in civic education

→ Establish mentorship networks within parties and public institutions e.g., parliament.



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

Advocate for youth-targeted grants or subsidies; engage development partners

→ Link financial access to youth political participation outcomes.



SAFETY & GOVERNANCE:

Advocate for enforcement of laws on political violence; partner with human rights organizations

→ Push for internal party reforms for safer participation.



AWARENESS & PARTNERSHIPS:

Run digital advocacy campaigns; leverage social media and community outreach

→ Build partnerships with media, CSOs, and youth networks.



TRACK: Follow up, monitor progress, and sustain momentum

Advocacy does not end with a commitment. Document what was agreed, check on implementation, and re-engage or find ways to escalate where needed. In practice this means following up directly with decision-makers and institutions after engagements, tracking commitments against progress over time, adapting your strategy based on what is and is not working, and building long-term coalitions and networks that can maintain pressure beyond any single moment. Small wins matter, each incremental gain builds credibility, momentum, and the foundation for broader systemic change.

Three principles to carry through every stage:

Experience in different contexts when it comes to youth advocacy efforts shows that the following principles apply regardless of the issue, the country, or the stage of the effort:

- 1. FOCUS MATTERS:** Advocacy is most effective when it is grounded in specific, achievable reforms. Broad calls for inclusion are important, but they rarely lead to concrete change on their own. Clear asks, whether on representation, candidate pathways, or internal rules, are more likely to generate action and accountability.
- 2. COLLECTIVE ACTION STRENGTHENS IMPACT:** Youth advocacy is strongest when it is organized. Coalitions, networks, and shared platforms help amplify voices, build legitimacy, and sustain momentum. They also make it easier to engage political parties and institutions in a structured and credible way.
- 3. ENGAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY MUST GO TOGETHER:** Building relationships with decision-makers is essential, but so is following up on commitments and tracking progress. Advocacy does not end when a promise is made. It continues until that promise is implemented.



KEY TAKEAWAY: Effective advocacy requires



Clear focus



Strategic
engagement



Collaboration



Tracking and
persistence

Use this framework
flexibly to adapt the
Roadmap to your specific
regional and national
political context.

04

PRIORITY PARTY REFORMS: What to Push For

Youth advocacy is most effective when it focuses on concrete, achievable reforms within political parties and civic spaces. The following areas reflect common entry points for change.

REPRESENTATION AND VOICE Youth should be represented in decision-making bodies, not only in symbolic roles. This includes participation in executive structures, policy discussions, and strategic planning.

CANDIDATE PATHWAYS Young people need clear and fair routes into candidacy. This includes transparent nomination processes, active recruitment of young candidates, and structured support such as mentorship and training.

STRONG YOUTH STRUCTURES Youth wings and youth platforms should be functional, resourced, and connected to party leadership. They should not operate in isolation, but as part of the party's core structures.

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION Political participation should be free from harassment, intimidation, and exclusion. Parties should have clear standards and mechanisms to address these issues and ensure inclusive engagement.

YOUTH-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT Parties and civil society actors should communicate and organize in ways that reflect how young people engage today.



05

WHAT WORKS: Lessons from Practice

Experience shows that youth inclusion is most effective when it is built into the structure of political systems, rather than treated as an add-on. The following examples illustrate different approaches to successful youth advocacy.

BEST PRACTICE: NIGERIA — NOT TOO YOUNG TO RUN

Nigeria's Not Too Young To Run campaign is one of the strongest examples of successful youth advocacy on political participation in Africa. The campaign focused on a single, concrete reform: lowering the constitutional age limits for running for elected office. In May 2018, Nigeria enacted the reform, reducing the minimum age for the House of Representatives and State Houses of Assembly from 30 to 25, for the Senate and governorships from 35 to 30, and for the presidency from 40 to 35.

What made the campaign effective was not only the clarity of the demand, but the way young people organized around it. Youth-led actors built a coalition around the issue and linked the campaign directly to the constitutional review process. Rather than relying only on public messaging, they developed formal proposals, participated in public hearings, and submitted youth-backed recommendations through official channels to the National Assembly.

At the same time, the movement built strong public visibility and legitimacy. The #NotTooYoungToRun campaign became a unifying message, combining digital engagement with offline organizing. Youth advocates used social media to gather perspectives, build consensus, and mobilize support, while ensuring that these inputs were translated into formal submissions and engagement with political processes.

Another critical element was persistence. The campaign did not end once the issue gained attention. Youth advocates remained engaged throughout the legislative process, maintaining pressure and visibility until the reform was passed. This combination of a clear legal demand, broad coalition-building, public mobilization, and sustained engagement with formal political processes enabled the campaign to achieve structural change.



KEY LESSON:

A clear legal demand, backed by coalition-building, public mobilization, and sustained engagement with formal political processes, can deliver structural reform.

BEST PRACTICE: LIBERIA — NATIONAL YOUTH MANIFESTO

In Liberia's 2017 election cycle, youth organizations including the Federation of Liberian Youth and NAYMOTE-Partners for Democratic Development used a National Youth Manifesto to engage political parties around a shared set of youth priorities. The manifesto was not just a statement of demands. It was used as an organizing and advocacy tool to bring together youth actors from civil society and political parties around a common agenda, and to press parties to respond publicly to youth concerns. Several major parties ultimately endorsed the manifesto.

What makes this example especially useful is the process. Youth advocates began engagement well before the election period intensified, allowing time to build relationships and shape priorities. They first held separate consultations with civil society groups and party youth wing representatives, allowing each group to identify priorities and speak openly about concerns. They then brought these groups together in joint sessions, followed by roundtable discussions with national youth wing leaders, to refine the manifesto, build consensus, and secure buy-in.

This staged approach helped move youth advocacy from consultation to negotiation. It also helped ensure that the manifesto reflected a shared set of priorities across different youth actors, increasing its legitimacy and relevance.



Another important feature was relationship-building. Existing youth leadership networks and training programmes helped create access to party actors and strengthened trust across party and civil society youth groups. This meant the advocacy did not rely only on public pressure, but also on sustained dialogue and engagement with those inside political parties.

As a result, youth advocates were able to move from general concerns to a structured and credible platform that political parties were willing to engage with during the election process.



KEY LESSON:

Youth advocacy is stronger when it starts early, builds a shared agenda, and creates structured dialogue between civil society youth and party youth leaders.

BEST PRACTICE: UK — VOTES AT 16 CAMPAIGN

The UK's Votes at 16 campaign is a strong example of sustained youth advocacy focused on a single democratic reform: extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. The campaign has already contributed to concrete change in Scotland and Wales, where young people are now able to vote in devolved and local elections, and has helped move the issue onto the national political agenda.

The advocacy has been driven by a broad coalition of youth and democracy organizations working alongside youth-led platforms such as the UK Youth Parliament. Together, these actors have used debates, public campaigns, youth manifestos, and sustained engagement with political representatives to keep the issue visible and politically relevant over time.

A key strength of the campaign has been its persistence. Rather than relying on a single moment of advocacy, the campaign has been sustained over many years, adapting to different political contexts while maintaining a consistent and clear reform ask. Youth representatives have repeatedly raised the issue in formal forums, while civil society organizations have worked to build cross-party support and normalize the idea of votes at 16 as a democratic reform.

Another important feature has been its incremental approach. Advocates supported reform first in devolved contexts, demonstrating that lowering the voting age could work in practice. These early successes helped build credibility and momentum, making it easier to push for broader reform at the national level.

The issue is now being considered at UK level through legislation that would extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds across all UK elections. While this process is ongoing, it reflects the extent to which sustained youth advocacy has shifted political norms and opened space for institutional change.



KEY LESSON:

A simple, consistent reform ask — pursued over time by a broad coalition and reinforced by organized youth voice — can shift political norms and lead to lasting democratic change.



06

ADVOCACY IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS: Advocacy in Conflict

Remember, the **Connect → Build → Influence → Track** framework mentioned in this Toolkit assumes that there is a degree of political openness and space to organize, speak to, and engage with institutions directly. But across East Africa, many young people in the advocacy space operate in conditions where that space is limited, unpredictable, or actively challenged. Electoral violence, armed conflict, and political repression do not stop the need for advocacy. They change how it must be done.

This section offers practical guidance for adapting your advocacy strategy when the political environment is hostile or dangerous.



UNDERSTAND THE TYPE OF CONSTRAINT YOU ARE FACING AND LEARN TO NAVIGATE/PIVOT



Advocacy in Instances of Electoral/Post-Electoral Violence

No political context with a volatile environment is the same, and the right response depends on the specific conditions on the ground. Electoral violence and post-election tension often have short windows of danger followed by periods of relative safety. In these contexts, timing matters. Advocacy that would otherwise be high-risk during a contested election period may become more realistic to pursue once tensions ease. The priority for youth advocacy in volatile contexts should therefore be to protect vulnerable groups e.g., women, children, PWDs, and youth as well as positioning youth as mediators of conflict so that organized advocacy around youth political participation can resume when conditions allow.



Advocacy in Instances of Armed Conflict

In instances of active armed conflict or fragile state settings such as coups or terrorist attacks, direct engagement with formal institutions is often dangerous or impossible. In these environments, the focus for youth advocacy should shift to documenting needs, maintaining networks, and building the case for change that can be advanced when stability returns. In this case, advocacy can be more effective at the local and community level instead of the national level as it is safer.



Advocacy in Instances of Political Repression

Where there is political repression or a shrinking civic space, there should be particular care around visibility and framing around advocacy priorities. Where governments actively restrict critique, direct oppositional advocacy can put individuals and organizations advocating for certain reforms at risk. This does not mean abandoning advocacy, it means being strategic about the focus of reforms, language, and channels used. Youth in advocacy should also avoid openly and directly naming certain government institutions and individuals in this case.





02 ADAPT YOUR APPROACH WITHOUT ABANDONING YOUR GOALS

In politically volatile/complex contexts, the core goals of advocacy do not change. What changes are the methods to approach advocacy. Consider the following adjustments across the four stages of the advocacy framework:

Connect: Build and maintain trusted relationships with key institutions and political actors even when public organizing is not possible. Informal networks with civil society organizations, peer connections, and diaspora links can keep communication open. Know who your allies are before a crisis.

BUILD: In politically constrained environments, framing matters more. Advocacy asks that can be presented as technical/departmental/ministerial, developmental, or aligned with the interests of those in power are often more viable than explicit political demands. Where possible, link your ask to existing commitments made by the government, e.g., legal obligations, party constitutions, or international frameworks rather than positioning advocacy as a challenge to authority.

INFLUENCE: Where direct engagement with decision-makers is not safe, intermediaries can play a critical role. Trusted non-governmental organizations, elders, religious leaders, diplomatic actors, or regional bodies may be able to carry messages or create space for dialogue that youth advocates cannot access directly. Digital spaces can also extend reach when in-person engagement is restricted but be aware that online activity can sometimes be monitored and carries its own risks.

TRACK: Documenting what is happening, even when you cannot act publicly, is a form of advocacy. These records can be useful in identifying pathways and opportunities for youth to advocate for representation in national peace processes and agreements, propose new commitments to advancing democracy, and call for more inclusivity in key government institutions while also providing evidence for accountability. Maintain this work carefully, with attention to the security of those involved.



KEY LESSON:

Conflict and repression can hinder advocacy but do not end it. Effective youth advocates in volatile political contexts protect themselves and others, adapt their methods, and stay oriented toward the long-term goals. They always have in mind the goal of structural political change even when the path to it is not easy.



PRIORITIZE SAFETY

Effective advocacy in politically volatile contexts requires an honest assessment of risk. Before taking action, consider who might be targeted, what information should be kept confidential, and what channels are secure. No push for reform is worth putting individuals in danger. Where the risk is too high, it is legitimate and responsible to hold back, protect your networks, and wait for a safer moment to act.

This is not the same as giving up. Sustaining relationships, preserving networks with a long-term perspective are equal forms of advocacy in contexts where speaking publicly about politically sensitive issues is a risk.



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