

Representation for the Future: Young People and Parliaments  
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### **Representation & Participation**

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#### **Introduction**

This Paper aims to give information on the importance of youth participation and representation in the work of Parliament. It also highlights international practices on youth participation in Parliaments, and also mentions factors and barriers that hinder the active participation of young people in Parliament then provides possible solutions or way-forward that international Parliaments have taken to address the under representation and participation of young people.

#### **What is Youth Representation and Participation?**

The participation of all citizens in formal political processes is fundamental for democracy. If a segment of the population is deprived of the right to vote or is disengaged, the representativeness and legitimacy of these processes is undermined. Although young people participate in political processes in multiple ways, their representation in formal political processes is limited. There is a growing recognition, however, that young people's involvement is critical to making Parliament more representative considering that the Youth hold a large amount of the total population in most countries.

Youth Representation refers to a deliberate and formal representation by young people through their elected or nominated structures in community-based governance structures.<sup>1</sup> For example the **Samoa National Youth Council**.

#### **Samoa National Youth Council (SNYC):**

The Samoa Youth Council is a Non-Government Organization established in 2012 to be the focal office for youth-driven activities in Samoa. There are more than 130 Village Youth Representatives who are active members of the Council. The Council carries out Quarterly Forums with its members to discuss youth issues and projects that the Secretariat carries out.

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<sup>1</sup> What is youth representation, accessed at <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/youth-participation-and-representation-in-community-governance-at-cato-manor-township-durban/74331>

These forums are also used to carry out awareness campaigns/programs to help build the knowledge and capacity of the members. The Samoa National Youth Council recently participated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in London in September 2023.

- **The Importance of Youth Participation:**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have noted the importance of Youth Participation and encouraged Parliaments to empower young MP's as the young generation are the future of any democracy. Today's youth are tomorrow's leaders, the youth bring new ideas, fresh insight on youth issues, yet they continue to be under-represented in Parliament.

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included; to make a difference in the longer term, it is essential that young people are engaged in formal political processes and have a say in formulating today's and tomorrow's politics. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right but also crucial to building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations. For young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.

### **The Benefits of youth participation and representation in parliaments**

- 1. The Voices of the Youth are heard and Empowerment:**

A more youth-inclusive parliament can help counter perceived disempowerment, or social, political exclusion of youth. More young MPs can be an effective way to give voice to young people and to empower them politically.

- 2. Addressing Youth Issues Effectively**

Inclusion of youth in parliament must demand greater parliamentary attention to ensure the concerns of the youth are heard, such as higher education reforms, youth unemployment, or any form of discrimination against youth. The Youth are more aware of their issues and therefore their input in solving these issues are crucial. Especially for building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations.

- 3. Youth as agents for change in democratic institutions**

There have been many young people involved in movements for change worldwide. They take to the streets through protests or online social networks where they express their concerns and campaign for change. They are fighting for sustainable development and a better future for current and new generations. As the youth are the leaders of tomorrow, it is important to encourage active youth involvement as they possess the energy, the innovation and they bring fresh and creative ideas.

### **Barriers to young people's parliamentary participation:**

#### **1. Cultural Norms**

Research has shown that the majority of traditional family authority causes problems with parents and the young. The adult and parent mindset are sometimes influenced by social attitudes and stereotype thinking; therefore lack of parental support can be one of the main barriers to active participation from the youth.

#### **2. Economic and Physical Circumstances**

In some countries, the economic and physical ability of the youth have hindered active participation. There are also crisis factors that other youths encounter such as family violence, psychological problems and other domestic matters which they must properly address before they can actively participate.

#### **3. Lack of relevant skills and training**

Another barrier to young people working effectively with their peers includes the lack of skills and adequate training in relevant areas, such as leadership, communication, social development and lack of understanding and training in committee-related roles and responsibilities.

#### **4. Time and money (resources)**

Since most of the young people are students, they do not have any income and they have to attend school, therefore, lack of time due to school and work obligations prevent young people from devoting as much energy as they would like to involving themselves in activities. Lack of financial resources has been cited as a primary barrier to initiating youth-led activities.

**What mechanisms or tools might parliaments use to ensure better representation for future generations?**

- i. Make Parliament more **accessible** – invite the youth to observe the operations of Parliament and build understanding on the processes in Committees and during Parliamentary Proceedings
- ii. The introduction of **Member’s Interface program**: This program allows young people to meet with an individual Member of Parliament to discuss issues important to them and make their voices heard through oral and written submissions.
- iii. The initiation of **Youth Parliaments** to advocate on youth matters and have their voices heard and recognized. Furthermore, encourage the Youth to use their energy and passion to change the world for the better, especially in the Pacific Region, climate change remains a threat as well as the increase of Non-Communicable Diseases – the Youth can engage their energy and use their time wisely by exposing themselves to important social matters that can make a great difference if addressed early.

## **Conclusion**

To Conclude, Youth Representation and Participation is important for various reasons as outlined before, it values and recognizes the needs and issues for the young people. Furthermore, it is healthy for democracy and to empower the younger generation to have their voices heard and to utilize their time on matters that are most important to them. It promotes healthy inclusive societies and ensures that the future generation is handed to the hands of such individuals who are better prepared to uphold democratic principles of good governance and it assures that all voices are heard, and no one is left behind.