

Thanks to this session I really feel like I have the tools I need to help other youth so they can carry out their own human rights work.

— Balquees, Jordan



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION<sup>4</sup>

Participation is a fundamental right recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The concept of participation is implicit in Article 3 – Right to life, liberty and security of the person; Article 18 – Right to freedom of conscience and religion; Article 20 – Right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association; Article 21 – Right to participate in elections and to take part in government; and Article 27 – Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.

Participation of youth has shown that young people have a meaningful voice in matters that affect their lives, and that their voices are taken into account. There are many different contexts, levels, and ways of participating; for example, planning activities at a local community centre, acting as a mentor to younger children, getting involved in local politics, or participating in a youth forum. The elements that influence their level of participation can vary widely from one setting to another or even from one young person to another. Regardless, there are three main, interrelated components that should be taken into consideration when seeking to enhance participation: **motivation**, **capacity** and **opportunity**.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Definition taken and adapted from: Equitas, 2015, *How to get youth to participate in decision-making*. Available at <https://equitas.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Jeunes-et-participation.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Definitions of these three concepts were taken and adapted from: Equitas, 2015, *Engaging Young Women Young Leaders: A Tip Sheet*. Available at [https://equitas.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/JFJL\\_Fiche-conseils\\_Fr.pdf](https://equitas.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/JFJL_Fiche-conseils_Fr.pdf).

**Motivation** is the desire or willingness of each young person to participate, and possibly commit to involvement or action over the long term. Motivation varies according to each person’s personality, preferences and interests, but is also influenced by each person’s experience as well as the opportunities available to that person to change things in his or her own life or community.

**Capacity** includes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that everyone needs to participate effectively. Capacity will naturally vary according to each person’s inherent strengths but will also be shaped by personal life experiences and the opportunities each person has to express thoughts and ideas, to work in teams, to take on challenges and to develop self-esteem.

**Opportunity** refers to any situation where youth can participate effectively. Opportunities vary according to young people’s capacity to create spaces, events or circumstances favourable to their full participation.

## LESSONS LEARNED !!!

Lessons emerging from the Mosharka project confirm the importance of motivation, capacity and opportunity for meaningful youth participation.

### 1 MOTIVATION

The fact that youth-led human rights projects **addressed human rights issues that personally affected youth as well as their communities** motivated them to make a long-term commitment. As issues may vary from one community to the next, an inclusive, participatory process is essential to identifying issues that projects will address. Therefore, the process for developing human rights projects within the Mosharka project included an analysis of the context in which the young people lived. A participatory process, grounded in the reality of young people’s lives, allowed them to think about the issues in their community in concrete terms and motivated them to act. This approach led young people to “shape their own world by analysing the social forces that limited their options in the past.”<sup>6</sup> The result is young people deciding for themselves to act on issues that are important to them.

<sup>6</sup> Equitas, 2015, *International Human Rights Training Program*, pp. 1-49.

## 2 CAPACITY

In addition to motivation, capacity building is an important element as it fosters effective youth participation. **Developing appropriate skills for addressing human rights issues** is critical for implementing community projects. These include skills in analysis, synthesis, writing, planning, and communication, as well as in financial management. **Volunteering in civil society organizations** is strongly recommended as it is an effective way for young people to develop a range of skills, which they can then apply in their civic engagement endeavours.

**Knowledge** of rights and responsibilities as well as the internalization of human rights values enable the effective involvement of youth in a social change process. Moreover, young people who are well informed about their rights become responsible citizens, who are able to counter the negative pressures some groups may exert on them.

## 3 OPPORTUNITY

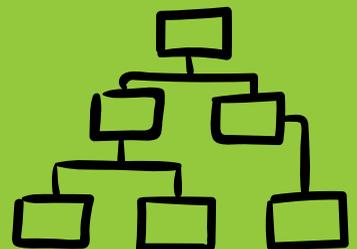
Motivating youth, building their skills and, last but not least, providing opportunities for them to participate will inevitably lead to their engagement. Young people want **real opportunities** to demonstrate their skills and get creative. Opportunities to implement projects in communities through video, street theatre, conferences, surveys and other events give young people the chance to put their skills to work and participate effectively in community development.

# GOOD PRACTICE

Throughout the course of a project aimed at promoting young people's civic participation, (i.e., from development to implementation, to evaluation and follow up) it is important to:

- Use a participatory approach, which allows young people to build on their experience, critically analyse and reflect on human rights issues, and develop strategies to move to action and achieve concrete results.
- Develop and put into practice skills and knowledge through training and volunteering opportunities and the implementation of concrete projects in the community. Skills to be developed include leadership, planning, management and communication, as well as specific human rights knowledge and skills (for example, human rights values, human rights protection and promotion mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review).

Progressively putting these skills and knowledge to work and using a participatory approach have a positive impact on the level of youth participation.



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION

## EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE IN ACTION

*In Jordan, a group of Mosharka project youth embarked on a literacy project for children aged 7 and 8. The example below describes their project. The sidebar explanations illustrate how the participatory approach was implemented and how skills and knowledge were developed, as outlined earlier.*

### THE ISSUE

Youth leaders trained in the Mosharka project identified as their issue the need to strengthen the reading and writing skills of children aged 7 and 8 in their community. They had observed that some children despite their years of schooling were unable to read or write. Their analysis of the situation revealed that the underlying cause was a lack of resources in schools in the targeted communities.

→ Youth involved in the Mosharka project completed a seven-day regional training session that enabled them to increase their knowledge and skills in human rights as well as in the implementation of projects in the community.

↪ Young people analyzed the problem drawing on their experience of the community.

### THE INITIATIVE

Mosharka project youth in Jordan opted for a different approach: train 38 youth on civic responsibility, and on how to improve the literacy skills of their younger counterparts in the community. The purpose of this was twofold: first, to develop the capacity of the 38 youth to facilitate literacy training for children and second to instil in the youth a broader sense of civic responsibility. Having completed their training, the 38 youth then worked with 155 young children over a period of 2-3 months to improve the children's reading capacity.

↗ Working in groups, the youth reflected on the issue and did a critical analysis of the best ways to get the results they hoped for. They then developed strategies for action.

↘ Through the training they received and the literacy classes they gave to 155 children, the 38 youth developed a range of skills, including leadership, planning, management and communication skills.

## THE RESULTS

Pre- and post-evaluations of the young children showed that literacy rates have improved, although not as much as the Mosharka youth would have liked. Notwithstanding, local CSOs involved in their project, in particular, Arabs for Sustainable Development (RUAD), the Jordan River Foundation and l'Association des familles pour le développement decided to include sessions modelled on the youth's project in their regular programming.

→ The project delivered concrete results and allowed young people to further develop their knowledge and skills.

