

Andrew: Hello all. Thank you for joining us. We'll get started in just a moment.

Hi all. Thanks for joining us. We'll just give it a couple more minutes so people can hop on.

Good morning, afternoon or evening everyone. Thank you for joining the IFES celebrating youth engagement for global action. Note this event is recorded and you give your consent to materials. I'm the youth and engagement director at IFES. IFES is pleased to host this event to highlight the work young leaders are doing to promote youth engagement for global action. For those joining IFES for the first time, we support global processes around the world since the late 1980s. We support formal and non formal engagements, civic engagement, building advocacy skills. During COVID-19 IFES has supported young people around the world during the pandemic. During today's event we're excited to hear from you. Engage with the thumbs up icon if you like something. For closed captions, see the URL in the chat supplied by Typewell. Enter the URL for the streaming text, that way you can minimize and reshape it or move it to a convenient screen location. Or use a separate device like a tablet.

With that, our panel. First, Sushmita Shrestha a young woman from Nepal working with our youth partner. Focusing on youth engagement and advocacy. Rashid Bilalov participating in our course, Theory to Practice who is a founding member of the organization for youth engagement. Finally Oluwafemi who works as head of research and communication tracking human rights violation during COVID-19.

Now Ashley Law to get the discussion going.

Ashley Law: Thank you to the introduction to IFES and myself and the great panelists. I'm the youth specialist at IFES, working on people's knowledge and skills around civic engagement and political participation. Young people under 30 make up 50% of the population. It's important we design programs for young people to participate, leading initiatives for change across the globe. It's important we seek out opportunities for young people to share their concerns and what they are doing.

Today we're honored to have Rashid and Femi and Sushmita talking about how their actions contribute to positive global change. I want to start by asking our young leaders to share a bit more about themselves. Today as we celebrate international youth day and today the day for international action, we want to share what this means. Sushmita, how have you worked in your community?

Sushmita Shrestha: For me the International Youth Day is a day to work to a common goal. Our country is 40% youth and we engage in democratic processes, to shape the future of our country. Urban and rural youth should get equal access to education.

Shall I mention about the work we're doing?

As a part of the youth program, we engage in border activities, concerned with their rights. Educating youth on governance, the rights and duties of government, how youth can create a positive space, participate in government system. It's a local government and it's important for youth to engage directly

with government representatives. It includes election, government trainings, collaborations, advocacy with representatives on local programs.

Thank you.

Ashley Law: Thank you, it's really interesting to hear about the work you're doing in Nepal.

Rashid Bilalov: Thank you for having me, and being on this panel with a lot of young people talking about these things. International Youth Day is a great opportunity for young people to speak up, have this voice. In a lot of situations, Ukraine and a lot of countries, we have a certain problem, we are not always heard. This is a day we can share, talk about these important issues we're trying to change.

As Andrew said, I was an alumna have the course Democracy from Theory to Practice. It was a course in Ukraine where I'm from. It's the course that gave me the fundamental principles of democracy giving me deeper understanding of how this works. And showed me how as a student I can actually change things I don't like. And gave me tools for making the community I live in a bit better and a bit more aware of the things we're going through.

But one of the most important things the course gave is, I found like-minded people. People who are on the same page with me. This is how we created the youth democratic association. Students from all over Ukraine sharing the same values. We came up with the idea to create the organization YODA. We created this organization not a long time ago. But in this short period of time we managed to pull through a number of projects on youth engagement and participation. That's our mission, to mobilize for the development of our community and democratic progress in Ukraine.

Ashley Law: Thanks. It's interesting how taking a civic education course led to you and a couple alumni founding this organization YODA.

Femi we'd love to hear your thoughts and the work you do.

Oluwafemi: Thank you. International Youth Day is a day for youth to come together and to look at the ideology they believe in and what the government should do to meet their needs. Youth engagement is also about development process, getting young people involved in responsible, challenging actions to create a positive social change.

For me it's about talking about by youth, for youth, with youth. I work with an initiative, a non-partisan organization for citizen-led democratic development. Citizen participation, government participation, strong institutions. We do a lot with youth development. Very recently we organized volunteers across the state to use your people to actually track. At that moment, gender based violence was actually on the high side. The increase. It's an issue in this part of the world. We stand in that gap to see how to use young people to track and report human rights violations. We did this with IFES. This youth violence tracking initiative is providing impartial evidence for true data, true advocating for law against GPV and

gender based violence. It was discovered that before lockdown and during COVID-19 lockdown, there was 149 % increase in cases reported during lockdown compared to issues before lockdown. This data worked up a lot of persons. Even though there was a campaign, this particular data actually informed advocacy. Right now the national assembly in Nigeria is working on the law.

I think in the news they had a law to stiffen penalties against sexual offenders and a whole lot. That's basically from me.

Ashley Law: Thanks Femi. The work you're doing and the work Rashid and Sushmita do is all democracy doing and important work. I appreciate you sharing a little on what you do. Given the current pandemic, how have you adapted your approach to engaging your peers, community members, how do you lead with the work you do with the barriers COVID-19 has posed. Femi, we'll kick it back to you to start this question.

Oluwafemi: COVID-19 is the invisible force everyone is combatting. I think it's a test on human relation. Relationships between humans.

[Switching transcribers]

Oluwafemi: one of the ways we have been able to do this is that we ensure through initiatives and with the support of Nigeria and the money towards our volunteers is received, we train them with technology, web based platforms, Zoom especially. We have an existing online community on Whatsapp where we pass information, we leverage all these platforms. Also Twitter, Facebook, Instagram. We passionately leverage these platforms to engage our audience.

Through infographs we discover these things that people don't even read, so what we do is visualize our data in infographics so that at a glance the audience and youth across the world can get the information at a glance. Thank you.

Ashley: Great points there. Sushmita, can we turn over to you?

Sushmita: Yes, most of the things Oluwafemi mentioned we do but we have changed some due to the pandemic. We've been using digital tools as mentioned, we have been hosting webinars, numerous webinars with representatives and youths, youth focused programs. Recently we had a fiscal year and an announcement, in that way we had webinars engaging elected representatives and some from three years in government. To improve youth focused process and youth participation and process through webinars during the pandemic. Also, we have been doing the work since the lockdown and maintaining social distancing. Despite this, we have been doing a monitoring and reporting on accessibility and covid responses targeting youth.

On the part of social media, we have a lot of web based applications to provide civic education and also through audio messages and infographs.

Ashley: Thanks Sushmita. Rashid, will turn over to you now to also answer.

Rashid: A lot of things have been mentioned here but there are some things we also need during Covid-19 which caused some difficulties for us but we did it and tried to engage as many young people as possible. So, of course we used web conferences and Zoom and made some webinars for young people for anyone interested. A lot of the things we did were the Online Democratic Marathon project which was created to increase knowledge of core values of democracy and encourage discussions. We united young people from all over Ukraine and all countries to talk about democratic values and core values.

Along side that, we tried to communicate with our lawmakers and have dialogue between them and students and we made it. We have this project which was to improve trust in authorities and increase awareness of public issues and deepen understanding of how government works and allows students to ask questions to lawmakers.

We also have our social media accounts, Instagram and Facebook. We have been trying to post the infographics about core values and democracy. We have people following and engaging and getting information about these important things. These are the things we have been doing altogether in the organization. What Sushmita said, that's also part of our job.

Ashley: Thank you Rashid. You bring up the next question, a lot of young people say they find it hard to connect with lawmakers and be at that formal table where decisions are made. Are there particular ways and strategies, maybe you could elaborate more, other ways you found helpful in promoting young peoples right to participate with elected officials and bridging that gap? Oluwafemi we can start with you.

Oluwafemi: Okay, connecting with elected leaders with youth in my community, one strategy I have seen and worked over the years is basically engaging lawmakers with fact. It's in a way, in my community, there is disbelief that youth have a demand for money and material things. It has created a barrier between the two entities. So what we have been doing in our agenda, we focus on impact and implementing and we capture the voice of the young people. At the local level, some of the court officials don't even have the data so we saw this as a way to engage them. We do a lot of desk research and come to them with fact and constructive engagement, not attacking, that's where the slogan "Advocacy is not laluta", that's a word here in Nigeria.

We started by doing research, aggregating the words of the youth, what are your means? We sampled this across the government, analyzed and presented to the government as an agenda from the youth. That was where the advocacy started from, going to them with fact and previous projects demonstrating the marginalization of youth in past years. They were surprised because them as the other side does not have a clear view of what is happening. After we went to them with data, the youth and development framework for the state was developed so when administration goes by there's an administration that's concerned with youth needs and development, so we started the legislation and the need for youth

development commission in the state. Recently, we give the data as a fact and we look at the model to see how we work from a technical aspect, we put together a bill and presented it to the house. Thanks to the leadership from the House of Assembly we learned how to put this together. Basically, more direct engagement brings the youth closer to them. We stage an event where the youth brings the speaker. We go across members of the House of Assembly and the speaker will meet with the youth in a Townhall.

We stage this and actually spoke with the youth, they spoke a lot about their needs and what they want from the government. The expectation from the legislation branch of government in my community, they actually experienced the expectation from the youth. Let me briefly talk about the gender based violence initiative. We came up with a lot of recommendations. We put this out and some government officials and executives, we sent to them and followed up. It's actually from the speedy reaction towards passing this into law that increased the punishment against sex offenders in the country. Thank you so much.

Ashley: Thank you Oluwafemi, you have brought to light some great strategies. I like the idea of the youth development commission, you have all done great work. Can we turn it over to Sushmita?

Sushmita: Yes, most of the things Oluwafemi already mentioned, there are similarities between what he has been doing and what we have been doing in Nepal. Before the lockdown, we were going into the community, identifying their needs and priorities and based on that we develop a memorandum through the local governments so their voice can be heard. Due to Covid pandemic we have been hosting webinars on needs and priorities and developed a policy document, identifying policies at local level. Engagement of youth during local level planning happens every year, resource mapping and economic empowerment. Our policy platform document continuously engages the youth and local governments on covid-19, our work has been recognized and we were selected as a member of the Covid Response Committee. We have 92 members and have been working in 44 districts, the Ministry of Women and Children recognize us and our work. So, that's from our side. Thank you.

[switching transcribers]

Ashley Law: Thanks Sushmita. It sounds like a policy platform is a great tool and also you're getting involved in COVID response development strategy. A lot of conversations are coming up for bridging the gap in allowing young people inform the strategies in response to the pandemic. It's good that's happening in Nepal. Rashid, would you like to mention as well?

Rashyd: A lot of the things Femi and Sushmita mentioned. We are trying to do the same things, develop the democratic values, bridging young people and lawmakers.

We have this topic with one of the lawmakers, we had a policymaker have a conversation with one of the students, she was very interested as a representative of young people in the parliament. We had people asking questions to the lawmaker, all based on how education would be developed and whether

young people could be part of it.

Many young people were on that meeting, they connected her to give the agenda and the topics they are trying to develop in Ukraine. Many organizations have tried to do the same thing.

What many organizations have passed on is we tried to contact the lawmaker who's actually there, making a change with young people trying to make the change in education or any sphere possible. That's one of the ways we tried to contact them and bring young people into this. We have many webinars on how young people create a petition, write a petition so it gets enough signs and how you can do that. And which way and what kind of topic, and what you should do.

It's not like how Sushmita and Femi have done, I'm very impressed, here step by step we're trying to engage young people here. A little spoiler, this fall 2020 because we'll have elections we'll also be part of a huge campaign to encourage young people to go out and vote and show people they are part of the country and to change something they don't like. To have this agenda so we are heard. That's just the start of it. In protecting human rights in Ukraine and developing democratic values and develop as much as we can.

Ashley Law: Thanks Rashyd. It's great to see the passion you speak about with democracy in Ukraine. And in all of you. I appreciate you brought up petitions, this is something young people are using with COVID-19 cause of social distancing and not gathering.

Femi you might have had one more comment on this question?

Oluwafemi Adebayo: Thank you so much. It's nice to hear Sushmita and Rashyd talk about what they've been doing. This same question, basically there's need for young people also. If the legislators or policy makers are not really willing, we come up with an innovative way, an event. These are persons who love to be part of innovation. We started something called the Democracy School. This is not a regular form of school. We bring young people, we instill these democratic ideals to bring and raise young leaders. We bring legislators to come and teach the way things are happening in the chambers. We bring the executive to explain to them their role in government and what they do. These are innovative ways we make the young people and elected leaders come together so there's interaction and engagement.

Ashley Law: Thanks, I appreciate you sharing that as well. We'll wrap up to address questions folks are asking on Facebook Live. I want you to have a little fun with this one, and speak to other young leaders. What advice or tips do you share with other young leaders to influence local strategies to better reflect their views, opinions, what's important to them? I wonder if you have targeted advice to young women, young people with disabilities facing other barriers. Rashyd can we start with you?

Rashyd: Of course. When I think about the question I have thought about organizations like we are and are sharing, for young people to be a part of. Non-profit and non-government organizations make a lot of changes and influence lawmakers, we have the power to do it.

I do believe the strategy of influencing through social media through COVID-19 is a big thing to do. Through Instagram or facebook accounts. Speaking up on an issue brings the attention of people and solves this problem.

I would say that I still believe the first and most important is youth parliaments, youth non-profits and so on. We have an inclusive society where everyone can be part of it. Or you want to be part of that organization and also want to focus on something else, you can be a member of it and join, and do many great things. This is the strategy I have for young people.

For those who are active and who want to change something they don't like. As digital participation, online participation. If you don't want to be part of a formal organization, you can make your own online petition on a topic. Or, be part of us. Be part of young people focused on democratic values, on environmental problems. Every organization I heard of are doing the public events and educating young people, and not just young people but everyone interested. Having petitions, gathering people in peaceful protests. Different organizations are trying to implement that as well.

Ashley Law: Thank you Rashyd. There are many ways young people can participate. Formal process, informal process, public facing, or behind the scenes. No matter what it is, it does contribute. Sushmita would you like to share some thoughts on this?

Sushmita Shrestha: Yes. What I'd like to add is that young people should be aware of their rights, and their needs, and the needs of their community. Once they know what's provided by government, they're better able to advocate for rights. For short and long term goals, it's better to identify smart goals. Specific, measurable, attainable, very important. For advocacy, either individual or organizing level, for a clear picture for effective tools and methods for advocacy.

Thank you.

Ashley Law: Thanks Sushmita. Great point. Young people sometimes need to build up knowledge and awareness on what their rights actually are on political participation so they can take action. Great point. Femi can we turn it over to you?

Oluwafemi Adebayo: Great point from Sushmita and Rashyd.

I think young people if they want to advocate, to meet their needs and priorities known to officials, there's need for them to gather data. Data gathering advocacy. When you show facts and figures, you are constructively engaging. "According to data verified by this organization, this is what it is." To show the extent of damage to them. That's what it is for me.

Youth need to speak with one formidable voice. It's very importin. There's something in my community called "divide and rule." If they're not together, some part is speaking about the issue. These parts are

important. To speak with one formidable voice. Young people should not wait until when they have a bigger platform. We start from where we have currently. If we expect the bigger platform, it may not come very soon.

We need to increase our voices, at this current stage. Of course there's social media. It's an important point. There are ways we can make our voices known. On social media you can decide to say things that you don't say one on one. It's trending. Thank you.

[Switching transcribers]

Ashley: Thank you. I think speaking where you are and the power of a collective voice is so important, and the power of researching data, such an important point to consider. I want to thank you all for answering those questions and insights. I want to turn it over to Andrew to facilitate some of the questions from Facebook.

Andrew: Thanks Ashley. I've loved hearing all the perspectives and how you are engaging these different platforms. One of the first questions, "one can donors do better to support the opportunities for youth, like mentoring, digital support, etc.?"

Ashley: Sushmita, Rashid, Oluwafemi, feel free to unmute and answer. I think donors have a great ability to provide space for engagement but it would be great to hear what you all think as well.

Oluwafemi: I think the donor community have done very well within my community, I think there's been a lot of great partnership and support. I must say, to talk about what the donor community can do better, I think over and over capacity development and some of the issues have been that donors have been doing this and the National Democratic Institute, basically to do more capacity development for local partners. I think in a community where the word "globally" leans more towards technology, we don't have an option outside of technology so we need to support and I think this is important for local partners. Thank you.

Andrew: Did you want to add anything?

Sushmita: Our organization, I would say it would be better if the donor would support the policy advocacy as it's similar to capacity development for the partners. IFES has been doing a great job in supporting us to support policy platform and the way we can enhance our work but I'd like to add, like IFES has done, the other donors could focus on networking and policy advocating, how we could do a better job and get better results because we are all working to ensure youth voices and meaningful engagement, we need to develop this practice to justify their voices. Since there's many young people left behind, the donors and local partners need to work together to collect the voices of marginalized people globally.

Ashley: Thanks Sushmita, Rashid did you want to comment?



Rashid: I think there might be better development between organization and donors but these past few months we've had a lot of support from IFES and technical support and all the possible support to implement all projects so I cannot say, I can't give my insightful opinion on this very much, I apologize. Maybe we should work more and see how it goes.

Ashley: Great, thanks. The next question is what role should you play in maintaining transparency in the election process? Maybe Oluwafemi you can start off?

Oluwafemi: Over the years, I have worked with the support of IFES to do some work on violence and the Nigerian Violence report. Basically, young people in the community should be ready to volunteer, I think volunteering is the word to become a part of this process. Basically, that is one. Two, apart from volunteering I think there's a need for young people to be ready, I'm trying to tread carefully, to be part of the process at every point because during monitoring election violence we have seen a lot of young people being used to ferment trouble. So basically what we've seen is the moment you take the message to young people, the emotions are overwhelming for them so much people don't know what it is, I think there's need for young persons to gain the messaging and need for transparency in the election process. Most of the partnership with IFES has been working around this for years, as well as capturing data and presenting it to stakeholders. The last election in 2019, the data we gathered and pulled together with stakeholders informed and increased the awareness and conversations around creating an electoral offenders commission. Over the years, this discussion has been put aside but do to some of our engagement and the commission we have put together some of these reports and presented to stakeholders to also engage the political actors at the higher level. While we are doing grassroots and state level, some individuals are doing this at the national and top level. So I think basically those are a few things I'm going to talk about for involvement of youth in electoral process.

Andrew: Thanks Oluwafemi, it's interesting to hear how you use youth at a local and larger level as well, increasing your participation. Rashid did you also want to comment?

Rashid: Yes, there's some things we as the your people in Ukraine are trying to achieve including transparency and free elections here in Ukraine. In our latest elections we had pretty secure and free and transparent elections because of the young people taking part in this. Many non-profit organizations had calls to observe the elections and be part of the election process during the voting, so that's one thing young people could do to engage and be part of this. Anybody in Ukraine who wants to be part of free elections could be part of it, you could observe and prevent these things from happening. We as well as the organization are focusing on the youth engagement as our main goal, that's why in a couple of months in fall 2020 we will be calling on volunteers to observe the elections and teach others about the election process and how it goes in Ukraine. A year ago we had on a national level and now we'll have on a local level. We've had many young people sign up to be part of this and try to make it as democratic as possible, as free and democratic as possible.

Andrew: Thanks Rashid, I think given the context of local elections in Ukraine it will be interesting to see

how youth engage. Sushmita did you want to add?

Sushmita: Yes, one of the key components of democracy is free of fear elections so we have been doing that, building the capacity of young people to engage in electoral processes. One thing the youth can do is engage in the process, they can know their own roles and responsibilities towards transparency also. We are trying and have been doing advocacy for youths to be aware of their own responsibility and why it is important to ask for it. In previous elections here in Nepal in 2017, we can observe that many young people from Nepal were signed up as election observers as part of the organization. We don't have a policy to directly engage but if the youth organization can sign up to go and see what's happening, that's one thing youth can learn about the electoral process. Many youths don't see the election as part of their cup of tea, they like to go outside and not participate but these days we can see the young people changing their perspective and they want to know what is happening and why we want to raise voices about free of fear elections and be transparent about what happened during the electoral pre election process and after, the whole process. If we can sow interest and ask the government what happened, what is going to happen? I think asking more questions and using our right to information, from that government at the local level or national definitely will give us answers and practice free and fear election everywhere. The youth are the bones for carrying the election and can be used for creating propaganda during the election. Through that, giving them more knowledge about the importance of seeking awareness and raising voices about needs, rights and how we can make them transparent, I think you can create a mass gathering and through that we can get a transparent electoral process.  
[switching transcribers]

Oluwafemi Adebayo: Thank you. Very quickly, I think working on monitoring violence in elections, during, before and after. Having a methodology on the Nigeria violence report has helped us to work on the election security risk assessment. Young persons are involved. Also in gathering data. Eliciting opinions of everyone in the community. At lowest of lowest level. Their views of this election. We bring it together. We analyze it. And do review with key stakeholders with written information and we do this at every election. We put the report together. Pass to security agencies, and pass it to community leaders using state and non-state actors. This process starts with young persons and goes back to young people.

After this the message goes to young people. We use this methodology to speak against voter apathy. When we talk about transparency in elections, violence is one of the major ones that doesn't give room to transparency. We speak to vote apathy because it looks like citizens in Nigeria aren't interested in the voting process because they lost faith. If you stay away from voting, it's possible the same thing you complain about still comes back. When citizens don't come out, their views aren't there. That's my response, thank you.

Ashley Law: Thank you Femi. Bringing to light the role young people play in conflict resolution in electoral process is a great point. I want to thank all the speakers, for your leadership, your action, and your candor in today's discussion. You shared wonderful insights in the work you do in the countries you live and work in. We're grateful for the chance to listen to you all today. Thank you to Andrew and the

IFES staff who hoped the event.

I also want to point out quick resources that may be have interest. IFES has a COVID-19 briefing series. Recently we released a paper on inclusion and meaningful participation. In the paper we speak to how to include all people in democracies during COVID-19. This includes a specific section on young people participation.

There's also an article. I saw a comment on the Facebook video. There was interest in how to engage young people through EMB support. I want to show this article on how to boost young people's participation during COVID-19. This will also be dropped into one of the comments in the video. And of course to stay up to date, follow us on twitter through IFES. And also the youth engagement page on ifes.org. Thank you to the panelists, those who helped facilitate, and the audience. Have a great International Youth Day!

[End of panel]