



LESSONS FROM THE FIRST

**YOUTH
SOUNDING
BOARD**

IN NEPAL

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About the YSB

The Youth Sounding Board (YSB) is a consultative space for Nepali youth to have an influence on the European Union's actions making them more participatory, relevant, and effective for youth. It is an all-inclusive, multi-sectoral platform of engagement designed to bring together youth voices at the table to guide the EU's development cooperation in Nepal. The first cohort had 24 members representing youth from the Madhesh, Karnali, and Sudurpashchim provinces of Nepal.

The YSB aims to ensure that young people are brought to the discussion table to advise, guide and inform how the EU's actions can be more responsive to the needs of youth, and how the activities can be much more deliberate in addressing youth needs. This platform is an opportunity for youth to be involved and contribute to the design, implementation, and monitoring/review of EU actions in Nepal and a potential platform for dialogue with the EU, EU member states and the Government of Nepal. ■

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Foreword

2022 was the European Year of Youth, and the European Union took the firm commitment to engage young people in its actions going forward. With the Youth Action Plan in the European External Action, the European Union adopted a strategic partnership with young people around the world to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future. Our approach to working with and for youth is guided by the three pillars of action of the Youth Action Plan:

- **Engage:** increasing young people's voices in policy and decision-making
- **Empower:** fighting inequalities and providing young people with the skills and tools they need to thrive
- **Connect:** fostering opportunities for young people to network and exchange with their peers worldwide.

As part of this plan, delegations around the world have organised consultative bodies composed of young people to guide them in ensuring that EU actions are relevant to the interest of young people,

engaging them in our dialogue, empowering them with leadership skills they will use for the rest of their lives, and connecting them with other organisations and Youth Sounding Boards across the world.

On my arrival to Nepal, I felt energised to meet the Youth Sounding Board, in place since July 2022. This report, prepared by the young members of the first cohort, presents the main conclusions and recommendations from their tenure, from 2022 to 2023. The report showcases their priorities and gives us very useful advice that we will apply in our future work, so that our actions take account of the needs of young people in Nepal today. And of course, we are happy that the energy, creativity and determination of the members of the Youth Sounding Board shines through every page of this report – this is proof that youth are not just the future, but also the change makers and leaders of today when given the opportunity.

I hope that this contribution encourages all of us to actively seek out these opportunities for youth, so that they can play their rightful role in contributing to the development of Nepal and the world. ■



Her Excellency
Veronique Lorenzo,
European Union
Ambassador to Nepal

Introduction

why are
we here?

The YSB is an inclusive and multidisciplinary engagement platform that aims to gather the voices of young people, enabling them to play a guiding role in EU development cooperation efforts in Nepal.

The Youth Sounding Board (YSB) is a consultative space for youths to exert influence on the European Union's (EU) projects, plans and policies, ensuring they are better suited to the needs and preferences of the youth demographic in Nepal. It is an inclusive and multidisciplinary engagement platform that aims to gather the voices of young people, enabling them to play a guiding role in EU development cooperation efforts in Nepal.

Established in 2022, during the EU's Year of Youth, this initiative is distinctive in Nepal for its strong commitment to involving young people meaningfully in the decision-making process. We were part of the first cohort of Nepal's YSB and have now graduated, welcoming a new cohort of equally committed youth representatives. The YSB benefits from the guidance and support of its four consortium partners, namely Youth Innovation Lab, Helvetes, Oxfam, and Restless Development-Nepal.

In Nepal, the YSB is focused on elevating the voice of youth from three provinces, namely Madhesh, Karnali and Sudurpashchim. All three provinces are marginalised in some form or the other, sometimes due to caste and ethnic background and at other times, due to geography and poverty. As representatives of these provinces, we have sought to advise the EU on the relevance and effectiveness of its programmes in our communities under three

broad thematic areas – governance, climate action, and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). In the past year, we were able to take part in numerous events involving the EU and its partner organisations, observing the conception and implementation of various programmes while providing critical feedback through a youth perspective.

Through our engagement with the EU as a YSB member, we learned about a range of EU initiatives in Nepal, as well as gained a deeper understanding of the Nepal government's activities and the policymaking process which has directly and indirectly helped in our personal growth. Our interactions with local, provincial and federal officials also gave us a glimpse into the inner workings of the three levels of government, including their strengths and weaknesses. For many of us, this was our first exposure to the development world and how it functions in tandem with the governments of both Nepal and the EU. We have come away from the programme, wiser, more confident, and armed with closely observed knowledge of the many issues that continue to plague Nepal and the steps being taken to eliminate them.

We have benefitted immensely as YSB members and we wish to thank the European Union Delegation in Nepal for affording us this opportunity. ■

Established in 2022, during the EU's Year of Youth, this initiative is distinctive in Nepal for its strong commitment to involving young people meaningfully in the decision-making process.



Executive Summary

This report is a collection of our recommendations and feedback on the work of the EU Delegation in Nepal to make its engagements in Nepal more impactful and relevant to youth.



Youth participation in Nepal, in every sector, has historically been low. Even though we constitute 40.3% of the total population¹, young people are hardly recognised and consulted on policies and projects, even ones that will impact us the most. However, with platforms such as the European Union's Youth Sounding Board (YSB), we have been inspired, encouraged and empowered to make our voices heard for more inclusive and impactful decision making for the development of Nepal and our local communities. Throughout the past year, as

members of the YSB, we have engaged in and with a variety of activities, programmes, and organisations. We have participated in project launch events, monitoring visits, policy dialogues, closing events, and much more, giving us insight into policymaking and a voice to share our issues and needs.

As the YSB is the advisory board of young people for the EU's actions in Nepal, this report is a collection of our recommendations and feedback on the work of the EU Delegation in Nepal to make its engagements

1. <https://nepal.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Nepali%20Youth%20in%20Figures.pdf>

Highlights of the Year



Orientation, August 2022

We met as a group for the first time during this event, where we engaged in team-building activities, learned about the EU and networked with project partners. We left the three-day orientation inspired and excited for the year ahead!

...and we made new friends



Cycling with EU parliament members, September 2022

We enjoyed a cycling adventure through the streets of Lalitpur with members of the EU parliament and engaged in conversation about the differing viewpoints of youth regarding employment. Our discussion revealed that European youths prioritise job quality while young people in Nepal face challenges in finding employment opportunities.

*meeting people
learning a lot
understanding our power*



Civil society partner's forum, November 2022

The annual civil society partner's forum brought together many organisations that work with the EU. In this two-day workshop, we were able to learn how civil society organisations work and what can be improved. Most importantly, we learned about the importance of collaboration to improve the work of civil society and the need for more spaces like this forum.



Individual highlight — Nikita's visit to Brussels, November 2022

Nikita Bhatta, a YSB member, got the opportunity to visit the European Commission in Brussels for a policy dialogue with EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen on the theme 'Building Partnerships as the Way Forward in Geopolitically Challenging Times'. It was a great opportunity to bond and learn from other young participants.

“ I highlighted the need to include more women, people with disabilities, the LGBTIQ community, and indigenous people in policy making and decision making. I talked about young people's involvement in parliament, local governments and governmental organisations as well as the promotion of a continuous feedback system in youth action plans and self-employment among youths.
” - Nikita Bhatta



Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen's visit to Nepal, February 2023

EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen visited Nepal on February 8, 2023. She held an hour-long discussion with YSB members, where we learned about her experiences as a youth activist, teacher, politician, and now commissioner. We discussed important issues that we currently face as youth and she promised to deliver our messages to the Government of Nepal in her next meeting. We were also able to join her in monitoring visits to the Maternity Hospital's human milk bank and a consultation on the EU-funded Nepal School Education Sector Plan.



Action at home, April - September 2023

We had the opportunity to work within our communities while also learning about the project management cycle (from proposal writing, budgeting to implementation) through the 'Action at Home' grants. With this seed funding, we were able to launch projects to solve issues that we cared about. The grants were given to the following YSB members and projects:

- Pooja Chaudhary and Nikita Bhatta: "Strengthening Eco-friendly Menstrual Products"
- Sujit Chaudhary: "Youth for Climate Action Workshop"
- Pragya Pant and Asmita Rawat: "Best from Waste"
- Shostika Khatri: "Environment Cleanup for Women's Health and Hygiene"
- Lokesh Giri: "Project Zero Waste at School"



*proud of our work
proud of our country*

Individual highlight — Aagya's participation in the Global Youth Economic Opportunities Summit (GYEOS) in Washington DC. May 2023

Supported by Helvetas Nepal, one of the implementing partners of the YSB, Aagya Shrestha travelled to Washington DC to represent YSB Nepal at the GYEOS. There, she specifically discussed the issue of youth unemployment in Nepal.

“ I presented Nepal's case on the topic 'Youth Matters: Make an informed career decision today for a decent job tomorrow'. This opportunity has been a milestone for my career. I had an amazing time exploring, learning, putting forward my opinions and networking while participating in this event.
” - Aagya Shrestha



Ethiopia-Nepal YSB Exchange, June 2023

We were part of the first international YSB exchange with the YSB in Ethiopia. It was an inspiring exchange where we learned about the issues faced by young people in Ethiopia and shared reflections on our journeys. We realised that even though we are 5,000 kilometres apart, we share many of the same experiences as young people in developing countries.



Mentorship by Erasmus alumni, July 2023

The Erasmus Mundus Alumni - YSB Mentorship programme has been an incredible learning opportunity for us, for both career and personal development. Members were matched with Erasmus alumni, some of whom are still completing their programme while others have returned to Nepal and are working in various roles. Through this mentorship, we have been able to set goals, receive coaching and check-ins, and build a long-lasting relationship with our mentors.



Recommendations

We have some ideas!

Young people have not been part of policy discussions in Nepal as such discussions are generally closed events. Policies that are passed today impact young people the most.

How to improve policy

Dialogue is a vital tool in a democracy to build inclusive policies. A country as diverse as Nepal requires policies that address the issues of many and uplift those that have been historically marginalised. Nepal's strength lies in its diversity, but we need to ensure that every individual's voice is heard and valued.

Young people have not been part of policy discussions in Nepal as such discussions are generally closed events. Policies that are passed today impact young people the most. Through the YSB, we have been able to get a glimpse into these policy dialogues and have been encouraged to make our feedback heard. In this context, the YSB recommends the following to the EU to make policy dialogues more relevant, inclusive and transparent to young people:

- **Use youth-friendly communication**
Use language and communication channels that resonate with young people. Utilise social media, online platforms, and interactive formats to disseminate

information about policies and gather input from beyond those who are physically able to make it to the policy dialogue.

- **Build inclusive policies through interactive policy dialogues**
We suggest that the EU go beyond the one-day dialogue system that is traditionally used in Nepal. Instead, we should aim to create more interactive sessions that last for longer periods and include more diverse beneficiaries, not only stakeholders.
- **Develop feedback mechanisms to ensure policies are transparent and accountable**
Our experience has been that while we attend policy dialogues, we do not know the conclusions and impacts of these discussions. We encourage the EU to build a digital feedback mechanism that will update beneficiaries and those who attended the policy dialogues on what the impact of the dialogue has been. This will allow policymakers to be held accountable for policy actions and will also encourage young people and beneficiaries to remain engaged in policy making. ■

in Nepal more impactful and relevant to youth. The recommendations come from our experiences with different EU-funded projects and events, as well as the realities in our local communities as we collectively represent Madhesh, Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces. This report begins with overall policy and programmatic recommendations, and then goes deeper into specific engagements based on the three thematic groups that the YSB works under:

1. Youth in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)
2. Youth in Governance
3. Youth in Climate Action

Nepal grapples with issues of climate change while also trying to strengthen its governance structures and gradually advancing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) principles. With this scenario in mind, youth emerges as a dynamic and transformative force to steer the country toward a more fair, sustainable and inclusive future.

In summary, our recommendations to the EU Delegation in Nepal and its development partners cover these primary points:

- Youth participation in Nepal, in all areas, is growing. With platforms such as the YSB, and other youth advisory boards, our voices are being brought to discussion tables. However, more needs to be done. We recommend that the EU and development partners continue to lead by example and **advocate for the inclusion of youth voices at all three levels of government** so as to ensure our meaningful participation all way from the federal to the local level.
- **Prioritise youth unemployment and education to support the Nepal development agenda** so that adolescents and young people are able to gain access to quality, skill-based education

and have pathways to employment. Promoting investment in entrepreneurs and the start-up market in Nepal, especially when it comes to digital innovations and climate action, will help increase employment.

- Utilise digital innovation and digital tools in development projects to reach more beneficiaries and create long-term impact. **International development organisations must expand beyond the traditional ways of working and take advantage of new tools**, such as social media.
- Youth in GESI: to build an equitable society, we must begin conversations on intersectionality, GESI and equality at the school level. The EU can **advocate to add a GESI component to school curricula or by training youth clubs to educate themselves and others** on GESI. Boys, men and sexual minorities should be included in discussions around GESI to ensure we have safe spaces for everyone.
- Youth in Governance: political literacy is still low in Nepal with many people only voting based on party and family or not voting at all. **Youth should be included as mobilisers for political literacy campaigns**, not only during election years. Local governments must also initiate the inclusion and participation of young people in community development and policy making.
- Youth in Climate Action: **invest in climate-smart technology, entrepreneurs and training**. There is scope for a sustainable and climate-smart market in Nepal, but its implementation and slow uptake has been a hindrance to young people who are passionate and interested in working in the field. Additionally, development projects should make certain environmental impact assessments include the socio-cultural impacts of the projects on indigenous communities. ■

go digital

With platforms such as the YSB, and other youth advisory boards, our voices are being brought to discussion tables. However, more needs to be done.

How to improve programming

We commend the EU's work targeting Madhesh, Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces – all provinces that have been historically marginalised based on identity, geography, and historical politics. The inclusive nature of the EU's actions, including the YSB, ensures diverse viewpoints and has given us a sense of pride in representing our provinces. However, youth involvement across the entire civil society space in Nepal has been limited. We have the following broad programmatic recommendations for the EU:

- **Expand the reach of civil society through digital innovation and social media**

According to the 2021 national census, over 73% of Nepalis use smartphones² and 52% have access to the internet.³ But, development partners and international organisations continue to use traditional methods of programme and project management. The EU should invest more in digital innovation to tackle issues of GESI, climate action and governance, and utilise tools that can reach

more people and have sustainable impacts, for example: chat groups for GESI programmes, online courses on political literacy and data-driven climate applications.

- **Work with existing plans and policies first, add new programmes second**

During the past year, we were able to see the different ways that the EU works with local governments and organisations. In collaborations with local governments, we suggest that before adding new projects to their portfolio, the EU can first understand what projects are currently being conducted, if they can be supported and expanded through grants, and only then add new projects. The complete handover of projects to local governments should also be prioritised over the medium to long term. However, local officials must be adequately trained and prepared to take over such projects as in certain closing events, local government representatives shared with YSB members that they do not know how to oversee such projects.



2. <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/over-73-percent-of-nepalis-use-smartphones-1/#/:~:text=KATHMANDU,%20March%2025:%20Mobile%20phone,in%20Nepal%20carry%20mobile%20phones.>
3. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=NP>

*we want a seat
at the table*

It is important that organisations like the EU and development partners uplift and hire young people in their projects as more than volunteers.

- **Increase the meaningful inclusion of youth in Nepal's development projects**

The YSB is a great platform for the inclusion of youth voices in Nepal's development project. We encourage all development partners to initiate such platforms and engage them fully. We suggest going beyond note-taking to being an actual part of the event as participants, moderators, speakers, etc. This was implemented in EU programmes like the civil society forum and the discussion on gender responsive leadership during the 16 days of activism. We would like more of this kind of participation.

It is also important that organisations like the EU and development partners uplift and hire young people in their projects as more than volunteers. In most projects from Nepal's development partners, there are strict requirements for long-term prior experience (usually above 5 years) to be able to apply for the job, which is a great hindrance to the involvement of young candidates who might have the skills required but lack a few years of experience. More consideration can be given to whether these minimum requirements are truly necessary and if they are needlessly cutting off valuable input from groups such as youth who might have the lived experience but not professional work experience. Another avenue that development partners can explore is to institute more internships where youth can gain hands-on knowledge and experience. Such internships, however, need to be paid so as to make them accessible to more people.

- **Prioritise development projects targeting youth employment and education**

The EU's Youth Action Plan, which is meant to promote and include youth, should prioritise projects and grants for youth organisations and youth issues like unemployment. The current youth-related grants uplift youth participation in important issues of governance, GESI and climate action, but we would like to urge the EU and development organisations to focus on the economic empowerment of young people and

women in Nepal through job creation, innovation, and education.

Furthermore, as part of the EU-supported School Education Sector Plan, the EU can invest in skills-based training for students as well as teachers in the country. Our education curriculum does not currently match market needs and thus leaves many families questioning why they invested in their child's education just for them to be unemployed afterwards. In Madhesh province, the province with the lowest literacy rate in Nepal, we heard families express these very sentiments about EU-funded education projects in their community. While the project is undoubtedly doing amazing work in uplifting women and girls in education, the question still remains – will they be able to get jobs after completing their education?

In Sudurpashchim province, the majority of working-age people, especially men, leave for work in India, leaving women with little financial independence and the responsibility of taking care of their children and their husband's parents. As soon as students pass their 10th grade examinations (14-15 years old), we have seen our friends leave for work in India. Therefore, in Sudurpashchim, it is important to conduct projects that promote financial independence and skills-based training for the women who are left behind.

Specific to Karnali province, we have faced barriers to education because of poor infrastructure, both in terms of transport and educational institutions, and farming seasons, which is when students are taken out of classes to help with farming and picking yarsagumba for up to six months. The education loss impacts students greatly. The EU and development partners can increase community-based interventions to support students and help them find alternative schooling sessions while also investing in proper infrastructure will help students access the education that they have the right to. ■

Youth in GESI *everybody counts*

The meaningful participation of women, marginalised castes, and sexual minorities remains low due to conservative patriarchal beliefs, economic and educational differences, and gender and caste-based discrimination.



How inclusive is Nepal?

Harmful traditional norms that limit the agency and empowerment of women still persist in Nepal, bringing about inherent challenges in access to education, basic needs and social cohesion. Discrimination based on genders, caste, class, and geography persists to this day and the implementation of protective laws is weak.

The constitution reserves 33% seats in parliament and government offices for women, but the

meaningful participation of women, marginalised castes, and sexual minorities remains low due to conservative patriarchal beliefs, economic and educational differences, and gender and caste-based discrimination.⁴

On June 28 2023, the Supreme Court of Nepal gave a historic decision⁵ recognising same-sex marriage and directed the government to undertake steps to codify this decision in law. However, implementation has been lax, with many local officials still questioning

Discrimination based on genders, caste, class, and geography persists to this day and the implementation of protective laws is weak.

4 <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2023/06/03/number-of-caste-ethnicity-in-nepal-increases-to-142>

5 <https://govlab.com.np/placing-nepali-women-first-past-the-post-how-to-ensure-systemic-change-for-gender-equity-and-equality-in-nepals-political-leadership/>

validity of same-sex relationships and denying queer people their right to marriage.

Furthermore, six years after its criminalisation, the discriminatory and violent practice of chhaupadi, where women and girls are forced to live in cow sheds or areas separate from their families while menstruating, still continues in Sudurpashchim and Karnali provinces.⁶

Development partners can help build a new generation that will speak up against these discriminations, support and respect people from all backgrounds, and recognise the importance of an inclusive society. Youth-led initiatives are increasingly driving progress towards achieving gender equality, social inclusion and human rights in Nepal, but more needs to be done to promote young people in development projects. Teaching youth as

Development partners can help build a new generation that will speak up against discrimination, support and respect people from all backgrounds, and recognise the importance of an inclusive society.

Project Highlight: Empowered Women, Prosperous Nepal

In 2022, the EU, the UN and the Government of Nepal jointly launched a five-year programme called 'Empowered Women, Prosperous Nepal'. We were lucky to be part of the project's inception phase and gained an understanding of how ambitious joint programmes such as this one can be implemented successfully. Launched in February 2023, various YSB members joined scoping missions, launch events, steering committee meetings, and consultations.

While focused on empowering women, the project also includes boys and men in the GESI conversation and has a strong local intervention component. We are excited to see how the project will unfold as it is a timely and important project. Some aspects that we want to highlight and further improve on include:

- Ensuring the meaningful participation of young

people and women: In scoping missions and at the local level, it is important to continue to push for the meaningful inclusion of young people and women to get their valuable inputs in shaping the project. We noticed that while women and youth representatives were present, their presence was not very meaningful or participatory. For example, women ward chairs are part of these consultations, but YSB members noticed that they would often wait for the men to speak before speaking themselves, reflecting an internalised patriarchy that continues to place men at the forefront.

- Including youth mobilisers for community outreach for more sustainable local-level interventions: This can be a valuable way for young people to be included in the project while playing important roles in their

communities for long-term engagement.

- Organisational representation should reflect the project beneficiaries and goals: As a project that primarily targets Nepali women, the organisational representatives that go on local-level missions and meetings should also consist of a majority Nepali women. That way, it is easier for beneficiaries to be a part of the conversation, seeing themselves represented and participating in the project design and implementation. While it is important to also see men championing GESI at the local level, there should be a balance on such missions to ensure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their viewpoints and is empowered to speak on the issues that they face. ■

6 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/05/nepals-historic-achievement-marriage-equality>



well as local government about diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality are important ways to build a stronger and more cohesive society.

Recommendations

- **Advocate for the inclusion of GESI curricula in school and youth clubs**

We believe that real behavioural change comes from education so teenagers and adolescents must be brought into the GESI conversation for them to understand their privileges and the importance of an inclusive Nepal. These discussions can be included in the national school curriculum through advocacy by the EU as well as through EU-supported youth clubs. It is vital that all genders and sexual minorities are included in the conversation as GESI is not only a women's issue.

- **Empower people with disabilities and LGBTIQ people in EU projects**

The EU has many projects, all of which have GESI as a cross-cutting issue. The biggest GESI projects


that we visited and took part in were the recently launched 'Empowered Women, Prosperous Nepal' project, the Freed Haliyas Project, and The Story Kitchen. We have noticed that the EU focuses on female-centric organisations, which is a good thing, but we urge development projects to also prioritise and empower people with disabilities and the LGBTIQ community in Nepal.

- **Include youth as a GESI component in development projects**

Adopting an intersectional GESI approach in any activity is important to ensure fair youth representation and engagement. Young people from various different castes, classes, ethnicities, sexualities, and gender identities should be engaged in development projects across Nepal. One way, as mentioned above, is to build projects that develop GESI curricula for school and youth clubs. Young people can also be included in projects through inter-generational dialogues, an important tool to bridge gaps between misunderstandings, share real life experiences with people and build empathy. ■



Youth in Governance

↪ We all have a voice 

Improving youth engagement in governance in Nepal involves creating an environment where youth are seen as valuable contributors and where their voices are heard and acted upon.

How young is Nepal's governance?

Youth face numerous challenges with limited political opportunities and underrepresentation, arising primarily from scepticism regarding the decision-

making capabilities of youth, particularly within marginalised communities.

The Nepal government considers anyone between the ages of 16 to 40 as youth and introduced a National Youth Policy in 2015 to ensure that the needs of the youth are met while also ensuring their representation in political and governmental bodies.⁷

In 2008, to promote local autonomy, Nepal's governance system evolved from a constitutional monarchy to a federal democratic republic. In 2022, Nepal held its second local level and House of Representatives elections, where voter turnout was the lowest in recent years (61% compared to 68% in 2017).⁸ However, this round of elections saw a record number of young people elected to office, most prominently as the mayor and deputy mayor of Kathmandu, both of whom are under 35 years of age. Similarly, 65 Members of Parliament elected in 2022 are under 45 years of age.⁹

This kind of youth representation can be vital in shaping Nepal's policies. Improving youth engagement in governance in Nepal involves creating an environment where youth are seen as valuable



7 https://www.moys.gov.np/sites/default/files/nithiru/National%20Youth%20Policy%202072_2.pdf

8 <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/229/40>

9 <https://www.iri.org/news/youth-empowerment-and-the-future-of-democracy-in-nepal/>

contributors and where their voices are heard and acted upon. It requires collaboration between governments, civil society, educational institutions, and the private sector to provide platforms and resources for youth to participate meaningfully in governance processes.

Recommendations

- **Youth as representatives to promote transparent and accountable governance**
Two of the primary pillars of good governance are transparency and accountability, and young

people across Nepal have been advocating for more transparent governance systems and fighting against corruption. Development partners like the EU have encouraged such advocacy and must continue to champion youth representatives. The EU can also advocate for the inclusion of youth in building a digitally driven governance system that prevents corruption and also assists with accountability.

- **Increase political literacy programmes across Nepal**
The 2022 elections showed the dismal state of

*more space
for young
people*

Project highlight: Summit for Democracy

The ‘Summit for Democracy’ has united world leaders to tackle challenges and reaffirm democratic principles. It has also served as a platform to discuss critical issues and collaborate on solutions, reinforcing the shared commitment to democracy and its positive impact on societies. Through the project, we learned about the importance of democracy, maintaining the spirit of democracy, and respect for fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and voting rights. We were also able to realise the impact of youth opinions and their importance in a democracy. We have the following recommendations regarding the Summit for Democracy:

- **Active Involvement of Youth in the Democratic Process:**
To strengthen democracy,

development partners should actively involve young people particularly from marginalised communities to encourage their participation in elections, policy discussions and civic activities. Creating specific platforms for young voices and promoting global cooperation among youth organisations to exchange best practices and advocate for democratic values can help build a more vibrant democratic landscape.

- **Promotion of Civic Education and Awareness:** The EU and development partners should promote civic education and awareness programmes to ensure that young individuals understand democratic principles, values, and institutions.

Such programmes should be focused on understanding democratic principles, values, and institutions and teaching core concepts such as the rule of law, individual rights and equity.

- **Support for CSOs:** Development partners should increase their support for civil society organisations (CSOs) to create an enabling environment for the active participation of grassroots initiatives, advocacy groups, and community members representing a wide spectrum of opinions and concerns. They can offer valuable feedback to facilitate meaningful dialogue between youth and officials to represent the voice of youths and foster diverse opinions. ■

The EU can advocate for the inclusion of youth in building a digitally driven governance system that prevents corruption and also assists with accountability.

We need to know our rights

political literacy in Nepal. Through our election observations, we learned that many people voted along party lines based on who their family had voted for in the past. Many voters did not know who their candidates were and what kind of policies they advocated. While this past election did see an unprecedented rise in younger candidates, there are many young people across Nepal who are unaware of their political rights and civic duties. Development partners can implement more political awareness campaigns so that young people are more involved in the political process as both leaders and beneficiaries.

- **Increase awareness of fundamental rights and provisions provided by the government**

There are many stipends and benefits that are provided by the government to marginalised communities, but citizens often do not know how to access them or even that they exist in the first place. The EU can invest more in awareness-raising initiatives that impart knowledge on how to access such amenities provided by the

government. Youth can be instrumental in such initiatives.

- **Include young people in local government**

Development partners must push for more youth participation in local governance. As YSB members, we have been able to join different stakeholder meetings at the local and national levels and are always encouraged to be a part of the discussions. But, at the same time, we have also faced pushback from local governments as they do not know why we are there. It must be even harder for local youth who do not have a platform like the YSB to make their voices heard. One of the initiatives that we have seen has worked is the use of youth panels in local governments through the EU-funded Promotion of Youth Engagement in Local Government (PROYEL) implemented by Helvetas Nepal. If the EU is able to advocate for the inclusion of such youth panels in all local-level governments, we can build better, youth-focused and sustainable programmes at all community levels. ■



Youth in Climate Action and Sustainability

we are living through climate change

To combat climate change, Nepal needs to improve its disaster preparedness and management, encourage more people to engage in climate-smart fields and evaluate projects based on their environmental impact.

Is Nepal prepared for climate change?

Despite being a negligible contributor to climate change, Nepal remains highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards including glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), landslides, droughts, and changing weather patterns. In this regard, youth can be pivotal in leading changes with their growing role in policy decisions, representing Nepal in international forums and fostering cross-collaboration between various countries and organisations.

Even though Nepal is one of the lowest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, responsible for only 0.027% of total greenhouse gas emissions,¹⁰ it is the fourth most vulnerable country to climate change. The most common climate hazards in Nepal are floods, 38.1%, followed by landslides and epidemics (19.84% and 15.87%).¹¹ Additionally, parts of Nepal suffer from various forms of extreme pollution. A recent study found that Nepali citizens lose 4.6 years of their lives due to poor air quality.¹²



To combat climate change, Nepal needs to improve its disaster preparedness and management, encourage more people to engage in climate-smart fields and evaluate projects based on their environmental impact. To expand on these recommendations, we advise the following:

10 https://www.efta.int/sites/default/files/2022_01_19_Nepal.pdf

11 <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/new-animation-shows-how-climate-related-loss-and-damage-impacting-people-nepal#:~:text=Globally%2C%20Nepal%20ranks%20fourth%20in,the%20climate%20impacts%20are%20overwhelming>

12 AQLI; https://aqli.epic.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Nepal-FactSheet-2023_Embargoed.pdf

*we are part
of the solution*

There is a market for climate-smart technologies and projects in Nepal but there are very few employment opportunities for young people to engage in this industry.

Recommendations

- **Invest in climate-smart jobs and training**

There is a market for climate-smart technologies and projects in Nepal but there are very few employment opportunities for young people to engage in this industry. Therefore, we recommend that development partners provide more support to climate-smart entrepreneurs and students of sustainability by providing training, traineeships and establishing mentor-mentee programmes for younger entrepreneurs.

- **Review policies to build a more vibrant start-up market in Nepal**

Development partners must also review laws and policies related to entrepreneurship in Nepal to make it a more conducive and productive market for start-ups. For example, pocket zone divisions in agricultural policy have incentivised farmers to cultivate certain species in certain areas, which has been beneficial for farmers. However, this practice has been adopted in relatively limited areas. A similar approach could be taken to start-ups that deal with climate-smart technologies and practices where such initiatives are given support by development partners like the EU. Furthermore, through project engagements in Sudurpashchim province, we learned about how difficult it is for farmers to sell their products that are organic and grown with sustainable, climate-smart technology because citizens prefer to cross the open border with India and get vegetables for cheaper. This is a daily occurrence that has impacted farmers in the plains of Sudurpashchim province. EU investments in entrepreneurship must go hand-in-hand with helping these entrepreneurs find markets for their products.

- **Mandate the conduction of environmental impact assessments (EIA), including socio-cultural and community impacts**

Development partners need to focus on identifying the potential positive and negative impacts of their projects on the environment as well as on communities. Although EIAs are conducted in most projects, they are often done shoddily and do not reflect industry standards. The EU and development partners must ensure that EIAs adhere to internationally accepted standards, which include public participation to identify issues and feasibility. Taking an intersectional lens, the EIA should also assess the impact the projects have on communities, especially with regard to whether indigenous rights are being compromised and if they are being compensated fairly. The EU can advocate for youth to be engaged in consulting indigenous groups to better understand socio-cultural and environmental impacts.

- **Advocate for more waste management and environmental protection programmes**

YSB members who were part of the youth in climate action thematic group participated in a Training of Trainers programme on waste management where we went to schools to share knowledge and tips on waste management. This project was a highlight event for many of us as we were able to see local changes in our communities and be part of knowledge sharing. We would like to request the EU for more such programmes where we are able to take part in the training but also see the effects of the training in practice. The consequences of waste mismanagement can be clearly seen in Madhesh province where urban areas like Birgunj and Janakpur have high levels of air and water pollution. ■

*we ♥ Nepal
we want to take care of it*

Project highlight: Building Energy Efficiency in Nepal (BEEN)

BEEN is a four-year project, running from March 2022 to February 2026, funded by the European Commission that is currently being implemented by MinErgy Nepal. Two YSB members participated in a three-day workshop organised by MinErgy on energy efficiency policy at the municipality level. We had the opportunity to explore and understand policy provisions at the local level regarding energy efficiency and the integration of renewable energy into existing buildings. We appreciated and enjoyed this workshop as we learned a lot, both at the technical and policy levels. Based on our attendance, we have the following recommendations:

- **Enhance youth involvement and engagement**

Although young people were part of the BEEN programme in influential roles, we believe that there can always be more youth representation. The EU can encourage young people to lead community-level discussions and interaction programmes in order to communicate the need for energy efficiency in Nepal. Youth can also be involved in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the programme in terms of practical application.

- **Integrate data and case study integration**

The EU can work to ensure that workshops, presentations, and real-world case studies relevant to youth participants are incorporated as interactive elements into group discussions. The importance of local case studies must be reflected in the workshops by encouraging participants to share their own experiences in implementing energy efficiency measures. Case studies from other parts of Nepal or around the world can also shed light on how to approach energy efficiency.

- **Diversify energy efficiency solutions**

The EU can ensure that workshops include discussions on the use of natural substances and renewable materials in energy-efficient buildings by highlighting the benefits of eco-friendly construction. Participants need to understand the advantages of working with the environment in the form of decreased carbon emissions, improved air quality and long-term economic benefits. Energy efficiency can also include traditional methods of building construction that keep houses cool during the summer and warm during the winter with the use of locally available material, which development partners can encourage. ■



Final Words

thank
EU ❤️

The Youth Sounding Board has opened up many opportunities to develop connections with people and organisations across the international development sector in Nepal. We have learned much in great detail and were able to experience first-hand the incredible work of the EU and team. We have also learned much more about our own country and our own provinces and communities. We have learned more about the problems that ail Nepal and the many solutions that are being pursued in order to alleviate these problems.

Additionally, it has been an experience of personal growth for all of us. We have gained experience in effective collaboration, increased confidence and public speaking, critical and intersectional thinking,

and just as importantly, realising the importance of never underestimating ourselves. As young people, we have been told that we need more experience, to learn more, and should listen to our elders. But we also have a voice and the YSB has been a platform that has cultivated and grown that voice, louder and clearer.

We are incredibly thankful to the EU in Nepal for its trust and confidence in us and for helping us along this journey. The recommendations that we have put forward in this report range from programmatic, policy and specific project-based recommendations. It is only with that trust that we were able to put forward these ideas with the belief that they will be heard and appreciated. ▀





Annex

Annex 1: YSB Members



CHAKRA OLI
Karnali Province



JAY RAM B.K.
Sudurpashchim Province



PRATIBHA SHAH
Madhesh Province



PREM BAHADUR B.K.
Karnali Province



**SUJIT KUMAR
CHAUDHARY**
Madhesh Province



PRAGYA PANT
Sudurpashchim Province



SHOSTIKA KHATRI
Sudurpashchim Province



VEER CHANDRA KAMATI
Madhesh Province



SONALI SINGH PATEL
Madhesh Province



**ROSHAN KUMAR
MAHARA**
Madhesh Province



PRIYA KARNA
Madhesh Province



PRABIN CHAND
Sudurpashchim Province



POOJA CHAUDHARY
Madhesh Province



NIKITA BHATTA
Madhesh Province



NEHA KARKI
Sudurpashchim Province



NAMUNA GIRI
Karnali Province



LOKESH GIRI
Karnali Province



JAIRAM CHAUDHARY
Madhesh Province



BIPANA THAPA
Karnali Province



ASMITA RAWAT
Karnali Province



ANKIT JAISHI
Sudurpashchim Province



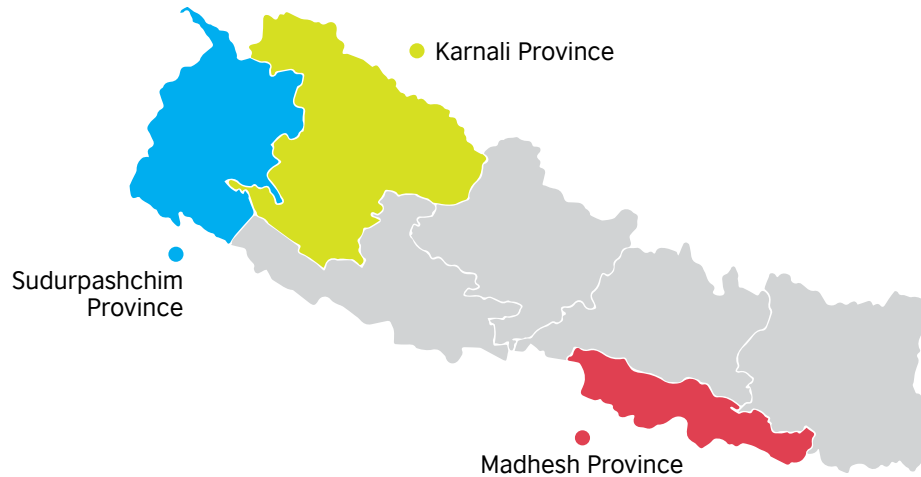
ABHINANDAN BASNET
Karnali Province



ABHASH KARKI
Sudurpashchim Province



AAGYA SHRESTHA
Sudurpashchim Province





MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD

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