Name of Project

Why Vote Debates

Under

Strengthening Students’ Participation in 2016 Elections Project

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As an organization, we look forward to working more closely as partners in the future with the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) as an independent, non-profit foundation, that is dedicated to the study and promotion of democracy and human rights in Taiwan and abroad, and we hope that this report contributes to the foundation’s vision of advancing a new wave democratization worldwide.

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The Taiwan Foundation for Democracy

Taiwan Foundation for Democracy (TFD) is an independent, non-profit foundation, that is dedicated to the study and promotion of democracy and human rights in Taiwan and abroad, and we hope that this report contributes to the foundation’s vision of advancing a new wave democratization worldwide.

The Foundation established in Asia is devoted to strengthening democracy and human rights in Taiwan and abroad. The Foundation's primary concerns are to further consolidate Taiwan's democratic system, to promote democracy in Asia, and to participate actively in the global democratic network.

The Foundation is committed to the vision of working together with like-minded organizations and individuals, building on Taiwan's experience to advance a new wave of democratization worldwide. The TFD three grants programs involve: international grants, domestic grants, and grants to Taiwan’s major political parties. The international grants program non-governmental organizations, academic institutions or think tanks is designed to assist organizations based outside of Taiwan to carry out projects to promote democracy and human rights.

Project Background

The “Strengthening Students Participation in 2016 Elections and beyond project” intended to continue to engage students in activities that are geared towards enhancing their participation in the 2016 elections and beyond. Students for Global Democracy Uganda (SGD Uganda), the implementing agency has sought to address challenges of young people’s (especially students of voting age), participation in electoral processes through a participatory approach. The project focused on encouraging students to develop a sense of ownership of the upcoming elections by strengthening young people’s active involvement in multiparty politics. 1 university and 2 high schools were targeted in the “Why Vote Debates”.

Students Why Vote Debate Series

The Students’ Why Vote? Debates under the Strengthening Students’ Participation in 2016 Elections projects supported by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, have been interactive sessions where young people from different political backgrounds have met and shared their focus and objectives as well as why they will vote or not vote in 2016 elections. The interactive sessions were also open to candidates vying for political positions because they offered an outline of why politics is important and most cases
because the biggest election issues often directly affect young people.

The Why Vote Debate held in 1 university and 2 secondary schools were based on the background that voting is an important right and it is a duty of every eligible citizen to exercise. Voting is very important to the future generation and this necessitates all eligible citizens, especially the new voters to know how to get involved, share with other voters why it is important. In this case, the most important issue is how to use our civic “voice” when it comes to making decisions, because if we dont, we will never make our voice heard.

Election Day is one of the most exciting days where citizens come together to elect leaders who best represent them. It is during that time, that we elect leaders that will stand for our rights as citizens, and hopefully keep their promises. Because voting is our right as citizens, as well as an opportunity to contribute to the political process, therefore using our right to vote should not be about voter turnout statistics, but rather an edavour to participate in making our choice and opinion matter. The sentiments of many young people asking themselves “Why should I vote?, Who should I choose? What should be the basis of making choice of candidate? and Why should I participate anyway. All these answers have been answered through the Why Vote Debate series. It has been emphasized that it is their civic duty to vote as well as their right. Young people have been made to understand that by not voting, we give up our right to do something, while abdicating our power to create change.

During the Students Why Vote Debate series, young people have been taught that, if they want to change and influence government in their life, they themselves must vote and with the action of voting, the end goal should be about making our voice heard on issues that matter like employment, education, health, participation in every day life.

**Background:**
Uganda will hold its next multi-party elections in 2016. Young people’s active participation is very important to change and sustain the electoral process not just as an event but rather as a process.

The Students’ community in Uganda represents a significant cohort of the total population that should be at the centre of national development and a new generation of active participants in the electoral process. Their immense numbers, energy, potential, dynamism and technical know-how make them a reliable voter constituency. However, the student community is not well informed about the electoral process. The existing
voter education initiatives are not student friendly and are inaccessible.

There has not been any platform to target young people in these institutions of learning during these important periods with messages for civic engagement. As new voters, they are more likely than others to lack basic information about the voting process thus affecting their effective participation in the electoral cycle. There are little accessible literature, promotional materials like banners, leaflets, manuals and all the related IEC materials on voter education. Further, there has never been a structural entry point to institutions of higher learning for such campaigns and there is lack of a coordinated approach or strategy of electoral process activities amongst stakeholders, mainly between the students on one hand and the other public, private and CSO players on the other hand to address the phenomenon.

Currently, Uganda is reported to have one of the youngest populations in the world. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that 78% of Ugandans are below the age of 30, while 52% are below 15 years. It is projected that 6.5 million Ugandans are in the age group of 18 -30 and this figure is expected to grow to 7.7 million in 2015. According to the Electoral Commission statistics, out of the total 14.5 million eligible voters in the 2011 elections, at least seven million were youths. In 2016, it is expected that at least 65 per cent of the eligible voters will be youth.

Despite the statistical case above, there have been sentiments made by youth seeing no reason to vote and this is due to the fact that many people lose hope of having their vote count further believing that they cannot change the status quo. Voting is about a process that should offer citizens power to choose candidates that represent them, and there after demand for accountability from those charged with the responsibility of running the state of affairs on their behalf, while wielding power that is guaranteed under article 1 of the Ugandan constitution; where power belongs to the people.
Project Activities

1.2 Name of the activity: High Schools Why Vote? Debate on Youth Meaningful Participation

Description: The high school Why Vote? Debates on youth meaningful participation in 2016 Elections and beyond were organized at Kawanda Senior Secondary School and Midland High School to strengthen students’ meaningful participation in 2016 and beyond.

Students for Global Democracy Uganda trained students on issue based and non-issue based manifestos and campaigns during elections. SGD-Uganda encouraged students and teachers to use the existing internal platforms like students’ debates, high school elections and assemblies to share the skills on youth meaningful participation in 2016 elections and beyond.

The high school Why Vote? Debates and dialogues were organized against a background that young people have to share and reflect about their participation ahead of the 2016 polls. In the case that the declining turnout is a broad societal issue and youth turn out to participate should focus particularly on the issue that motivate them to participate.

Date and location:
The activity were held on 29th of May, 2015 at Kawanda Secondary School, Hilton High School on and midland High school

Main outputs:
Ability to popularize the importance of upcoming elections amongst the young people.

Increased knowledge and understanding of manifesto development process

Improved youth capacity to analyze issue and non-issue based manifestos especially during election campaigns.
Increased awareness of over 300 young people who are potential voters and have been urged to undertake meaningful and active participation in 2016 elections and beyond

Increased understanding by young people that the leaders they choose will always have an impact on their wellbeing within the society through the power of their vote.

Increased understanding of young people linking service delivery to the quality of leaders they elect. Young people have been urged to choose leaders based on issues based manifesto such that they are able to demand for accountability from those charged with the responsibility of running the affairs of the state on their behalf.

Increased desire by young people to base the power of their vote by electing leaders based on their party manifestos, political party positions that focus more on service delivery rather than individual sentiment.

Improved knowledge and technical know how of young people on voting for basic factors rather than family, tribe and religion.

Increased view among stakeholders that local schools are positive hubs for democratic engagements.

Increased desire among young people to become engaged in community change efforts.

Better understanding of voting practices and voting tools through the mock election.

**Number of participants:** 300 students, 4 teachers and 5 staff members.
Fig above: A show case of students for Global Democracy works and projects during the Civil Society fair at Africana Hotel between
We need to find out more about voting. Voting is awesome.

The government listens and acts according to the voice of the voters. If we don’t vote, our eloquence won’t count. Your vote only has power if you use it.

My vote is as much power as anyone else’s.

We’re all equal when we vote.
Activity 1.2: Guild Elections Why Vote Debate Serie at Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

Description: Sustainable democratic governance requires credible elections and full participation of a multitude of stakeholders including young people, and principally the student community. Citizens are mandated to elect officials, who are charged with the responsibility of running the affairs of the state on behalf of the people. Despite this power, citizens do not hold elections with seriousness; the politicians use their power to manipulate the voters during the elections. The leaders through such a process do not account to the population. Elections are then turned into events rather than a process of engagement between the leaders and the electorates thus affecting the nature of democracy.

Students for Global Democracy Uganda organized a WHY Vote Debate through Guild Elections Platform at Mbarara University of Science and Technology with participants from Nyamitanga Tertiary Institute and Bishop Stuart University. These activities were intended to find out the level at which democracy was deepening in tertiary institutions through monitoring the behavior among university students during their campaigns, especially about their conduct and how the guild elections can be used as a precursor to the 2016 General Elections. During the Why Vote Debate Serie at Mbarara university, the students were able to analyse the importance of elections and why their critical participation is relevant.
Date and location: 14th April 2015, at Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Mbarara

Number of participants: 112 students from Nyamitaga Institute, Bishop Staurnt and Mbarara University of Science and Technology, 3 teachers, 3 CSOs and 5 staff members.

Main outputs:
Through the Why Vote Debate, young people have been able to acquire knowledge, while believing in the importance of certain key democratic values, such as tolerance for divergent viewpoints, consensus and trust building.

The platform has contributed to young people’s understanding that their participation is important for a sustained and viable democratic political system. Young people have been reminded that the role of citizen in our democracy does not end with their vote, but more about civic participation in democratic life.

The Why Vote Debates have undertaken various messaging to offer young people a chance to undergo the barriers that may affect their participation in the general elections, messages on money in election, citizens’ political party financing, issue based manifestos, all these achieving a theory of change in Uganda’s electoral democracy.

Young People learnt that it is their civic duty to participate in elections, they further discussed and analysed that in the democratization process, self - awareness is key and they should therefore always equip themselves with knowledge about the entire electoral process.

Lessons Learnt/Observations
Since levels of political interest and involvement tend to pick up during elections and wane when elections are over, it is important to ensure a sustained process of communication and engagement with young people during the post election period.
Youth motivation has been built that elections are not events, but rather a process, and in the end there is need to foster accountability for electoral promises and enhance political credibility for individual politicians.

There is only one way of ensuring that young people, especially students become better instruments of sustaining democracy; young people need to exercise their civic duty and participate in elections not as passive participants, but as managers of the electoral process.

Sustainable democratic engagements should be built, because any case that limits the full participation of young people in ensuring accountable election management perpetuates opportunities for violent behavior through riots and irresponsible citizenship.

Many students even at tertiary level in Uganda still have a phobia for politics and this explains why few students were able to pick nomination forms and offer themselves for political leadership.

The project and Why Vote Debates in particular have encouraged high school and campus students to practice multiparty politics through guild elections platforms while encouraging youth within their respective political parties to join forces and create non-partisan vote coalitions.

Young people are eager to participate as campaign strategists, campaign message developers and manifesto designers for their candidates in the respective political parties.

The Why Vote Debates have amplified students’ voices on issues that affect their participation in electoral processes, however through a sustainable approach, young people have continued to sustain information through club meetings, debates and assemblies in schools.

Young people have been empowered with information they need for their democratic participation with sustainable platform for mock election practice and learning through elections simulations.
Challenges/Observations

Some universities and high schools were not easily accessible for engagement, as they perceived our engagements as being political.

Lack of enough resources to engage more universities and high schools on the Why Vote Debate Series, especially those with new voter and based upcountry.

Lack of enough and youth friendly Election IEC materials.

There are no sessions/platforms in most schools where students can engage with politicians.

These platforms have enabled youth understand the meaning of election, young people have been taken through campaigns, manifesto process as key issues that help in choosing a candidate of their choice.

Students have limited platforms/opportunities to participate in politics.

Students, especially in high schools are ignorant and lack knowledge about the electoral process, and more specifically the voting process.

Students feel that there is no point in voting, because it is unlikely to bring about the change they desire.

Students have a genuine enthusiasm for participating in elections, but they also want politics to change.

Young people lack basic information about the entire electoral process, for example most of them do not know the Electoral Commission Road Map for 2016 Elections.
Recommendations

Young people are as diverse as adults, have competing political interests and also have diverse perceptions of how best to influence the lives of their political system. As such, young people are not ‘victims’ or problematic’ as often claimed, but diverse and critical stakeholders in democracy, who often feel that their priorities are under-addressed in the Political discourse.

Young people want to participate in politics but they also want politics to change, political players, lets view our understanding of politics, politics should be about the things that affect us not what affects you.

Young people must not merely be given a voice, but also learn about the follow-up process after the elections and be able to further shape the debate through civic participation.
There is need for more education and information on why young people should get involved in elections and specifically the voting process, electoral commission and other stakeholders like the civil society organizations involved in election related activities should visit schools and engage young people in a school based civic education programs.

It is a problem that a great number of young people had not registered to vote, because no one has inspired them and therefore young people need to be engaged in all democratic process that make them to believe in politics.

Students feel they should provide them with sessions to engage with politicians, these sessions would give students an opportunity to ask politicians a variety of questions while getting to know them better.

There is need for young people to read political party policies, examine policies of parties that are tried and tested and then vote for a party with the best and viable option to social issues.

Whereas voting is a right, it should just start and end by encouraging young people to get and vote, but this motivation should be aligned to citizen’s demand and manifestos.

Young people should be made to understand the meaning of election and go and vote truly believing that every vote counts, and therefore make a difference by exercising their right to vote.

Too many people are apathetic towards the democratic nature of our country and many contemplate of not voting. While many don't vote, they after blame the elected leaders when things go wrong.

During political campaigns, the fundamental question is whether young people are passionate about particular social issues like employment, health and education. In this case, they should be able to learn about candidates’ views on issues that are important and vote in support of those beliefs.

**Conclusion**

Through the SGD Uganda training conducted under the Why Vote? Debate in the run up to the elections, promote citizens financing as opposed to candidates’ funding with
in their respective political parties all intending to achieve a theory of change of Uganda electoral democracy and enable citizens deal with the challenge of commercialization in politics. This will contribute to altitude change amongst young people and in the long run, see themselves as financers, who will be able to own the electoral process and demand for accountability.

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