A TOOLKIT FOR PRACTITIONERS

Accelerating Youth-Led Policy Advocacy and Accountability in the Asia Pacific

Lead Authors

Dr Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay
Nikita Rakhyani
Meghna Sandhir

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Contributors

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Contributing Organizations

All for Education (AFE), Mongolia	All for Education (AFE) is Mongolia's national civil society coalition, established in 2010 to monitor education quality and financing, strengthen accountability through citizen participation, and drive education policy reforms. It unites 34 diverse organizations, including human rights, women's and children's rights, disability, youth, trade unions, minority, consumer protection, and education-focused groups.
Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), Philippines	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional network of 264 CSOs and individuals across 31 Asia-Pacific countries, working to advance the right to education and promote transformative, lifelong learning for all. Its Secretariat is based in the Philippines.
Alliance of Civil Society Organizations in Tajikistan for Education, Tajikistan	The Alliance of CSOs in Tajikistan for Education is a national educational coalition promoting the achievement of quality education and lifelong learning based on the principles of inclusiveness and a human rights-based approach in the Republic of Tajikistan through the unification of civil society efforts.
Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh	Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh's national education coalition, has been active since 1990 and now unites over 1,000 NGOs, researchers, educators, and civil society actors. It leads coordination, advocacy, research, and capacity building to promote pro-poor, sustainable education policies aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education).
Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka	The Coalition for Education Development (CED) is a consortium of organizations operating at national, provincial, and local levels within Sri Lanka's education sector. Since its inception in 2004, CED has been dedicated to promoting civil society participation in the formulation and implementation of education-related policies.
Center for Youth Advocacy and Networking (CYAN), Inc, Philippines	CYAN is a youth-led and youth-serving NGOs committed to advancing meaningful youth participation. The organization seeks to transform the political culture and broaden the landscape of youth engagement through the implementation of innovative programs and the provision of targeted support services.
Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net), Philippines	E-Net Philippines is a civil society coalition established in 2000 to advance education reform through policy advocacy, partnerships, and active civil society participation. It champions alternative learning systems and inclusive education, with a strong focus on marginalized and vulnerable groups.
Coalition for Education Solomon Islands (COESI), Solomon Islands	COESI is a coalition of NGOs in the Solomon Islands working to advance inclusive education, with a focus on marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

	As the civil society focal point for education policy, it promotes awareness of SDG 4, conducts research, builds capacity, and drives public discourse on education.
Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), Bangladesh	The Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) is a public policy institute dedicated to shaping an "IID Society" – one that is informed, inclusive, and democratic. IID has held Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2000. The organization advocates for informed, inclusive, and democratic decision-making in personal, social, and civic spheres.
Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS), Pakistan	The Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS) is a Pakistan-based think tank dedicated to generating local knowledge, conducting multi-disciplinary research, and informing public policy for sustainable development. Originating from the Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan, I-SAPS engages government, market, and civil society through research, capacity building, and policy dialogue.
Karkhana Samuha, Nepal	Karkhana Samuha is a Nepal-based non-profit that equips people with the skills and mindset to shape their own future and strengthen their communities. Using design thinking and results-based management, it works across five areas (IDEaS): Innovative and Inclusive Education, Digital Transformation, Education in Emergencies, and Sustainability and Adaptation.
Network for Education Watch Indonesia (NEW Indonesia)	NEW Indonesia (Jaringan Pemantau Pendidikan Indonesia/JPPI) is a national coalition of CSOs working to expand access to and improve the quality of education in Indonesia, with a strong focus on marginalized groups. Established in 2009, it unites a wide network of NGOs and actively engages in education advocacy at national, regional, and global levels as a member of MPI/LEG, ASPBAE, and the Global Campaign for Education.
Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE), Pakistan	Pakistan Coalition for Education, established in 2005 and registered as the Society for Access to Quality Education (SAQE) in 2010, is a national coalition working to improve the quality of education in Pakistan. With over 200 member organizations across 65 districts, PCE drives policy advocacy, community mobilization, and public awareness.

Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASPBAE	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Education
CBM	Community-Based Monitoring
CRC	Citizen Report Card
CSC	Community Scorecard
CSEN	Civil Society Education Network
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
EOL	Education Out Loud
FGD	Focused Group Discussions
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
I-SAPS	Institute for Social and Policy Sciences
IID	Institute of Informatics and Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
LEG	Local Education Group
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MEVS	Marginalized, Excluded, and Vulnerable Sectors
MIS	Management Information System
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NoC	No Objection Certificate
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PFM	Participatory Performance Monitoring
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
REAP	Reframing Education Accountability in Pakistan
RMU AP	Asia Pacific Regional Management Unit
RTE	Right to Education
RTI	Right to Information
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToT	Training of Trainers
YAR	Youth Action Research
YfP	Youth for Policy

Acknowledgement

"A Toolkit for Practitioners" on Youth-Led Policy Advocacy and Accountability in the Asia Pacific is a collective effort by the Education Out Loud (EOL) grantees, who contributed their time, expertise, and insights to this initiative.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Education Out Loud (EOL) initiative for their unwavering support in strengthening the role of civil society in education governance and accountability. Special recognition goes to the Regional Management Unit – Asia and Pacific (RMU-AP)—Sanjay Rana, Anoj Chhetri, Dipa Dahal, Sabita Bista, Lata Tamrakar, Nargis Sultana, and Geeta Verma—for their guidance and encouragement throughout this process.

We appreciate the efforts of the Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka, which hosted the face-to-face workshop in Negombo, Sri Lanka, where we engaged in a WRITESHOP to analyze, reflect, and document these tools.

We are particularly thankful to Helen Dabu, Florence May Cortina, Rene Raya, and Lae Santiago from the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) for their invaluable insights, drawn from their extensive experience in youth action research and collaboration with education coalitions across the Asia-Pacific region.

Our appreciation also extends to the EOL grantees across the Asia Pacific region who participated in this Learning Collaborative and contributed to the development of this toolkit. Their willingness to share experiences, tools, challenges, and innovations has been integral to our collective learning journey.

This Reflection Note embodies a spirit of collaboration, and we are grateful to everyone who contributed, both directly and indirectly, to its development.

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About the Toolkit

Many countries today are experiencing a growing youth population that is actively participating in community processes related to local issues that impact both themselves and their broader communities. Young people are increasingly taking the lead, confidently expressing their concerns and advocating for change. However, this engagement often remains focused on understanding the issues rather than advancing toward actionable solutions.

In response to this challenge, numerous civil society organizations (CSOs) across the Global South recognize the necessity of strengthening both their own capacities and those of young individuals. This development aims to enhance effective advocacy for their concerns while also ensuring accountability among stakeholders. It also reflects a broader effort to draw from ongoing experiences and learning to develop a toolkit, rooted in Asian contexts yet designed with global relevance, to support and strengthen youth engagement in education policy advocacy.

The **Toolkit** on **Youth-Led Policy Advocacy and Accountability** is a collaborative learning resource developed by Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and the grantees of Education Out Loud (EOL) in the Asia-Pacific region. It was created between June and August 2025 as part of the Learning Collaborative on Youth-Led Policy Advocacy and Accountability. This document embodies a dedicated effort to compile practical and effective tools for fostering youth engagement in accountability and advocacy. Drawing from the experiences of more than 10 organizations across the Asia-Pacific region, it blends academic rigor with grounded, real-world practice. Key features of the toolkit include step-by-step guidance on using its tools; real-life examples showcasing successful youth engagement across diverse contexts in Asia; and facilitation tips for organizations working with youth to build capacity and ensure inclusive participation. Whether you're a youth leader, educator, or civil society practitioner, this toolkit offers adaptable, actionable strategies to advance youth-driven change in education policy.

How Was This Toolkit Prepared?

This toolkit was developed as part of the Learning Collaborative hosted by Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), based in India, for GPE's EOL grantees from the Asia-Pacific region. The Learning Collaborative was initiated by the Asia Pacific Regional Management Unit (RMU AP) and funded by GPE under its EOL initiatives.

The design of this toolkit involved an intensive process of discussions, the sharing of innovative tools, and collective reflection over several months. Grantees contributed their experiences using various tools in diverse contexts, documenting the purposes, processes, step-by-step applications, the role of youth, challenges, and impacts. The objective was to clarify each tool from initiation to completion.

The Learning Collaborative, designed and facilitated in alignment with adult learning principles and participatory training methodologies, established a truly collaborative learning environment. Grantees were engaged as active contributors rather than passive recipients of information, articulating their learning needs, questions, reflections, analyses, and strategies for advancing the youth-led process.

A series of online learning sessions, facilitated at the beginning of this learning collaborative in May 2025, initiated exploratory discussions and documentation on:

- Current program strategies for youth engagement and their scope
- Potential best practices for youth engagement that warrant further exploration
- Learning needs of each grantee to enhance youth engagement in policy and social accountability

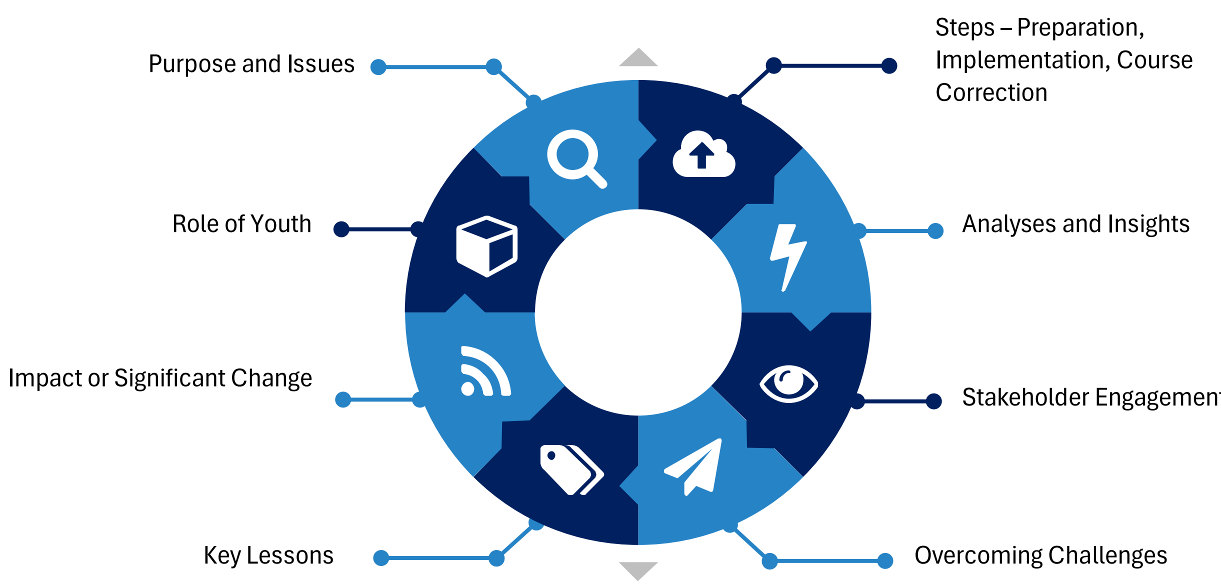

Figure 1: Framework for Reflection and Documentation of Tools

Building on this foundation, the Learning Collaborative concluded with an in-person workshop that convened participants from across the Asia-Pacific region. This gathering fostered deeper dialogue, cross-country reflection, and collaborative analysis of experiences and insights regarding each of these tools.

A substantial portion of the workshop was devoted to a writeshop, during which grantees reflected on, analyzed, and documented selected tools and techniques they employed to generate evidence, engage stakeholders, and advocate for change alongside young people. Figure 1 illustrates the framework that was used to document each tool.

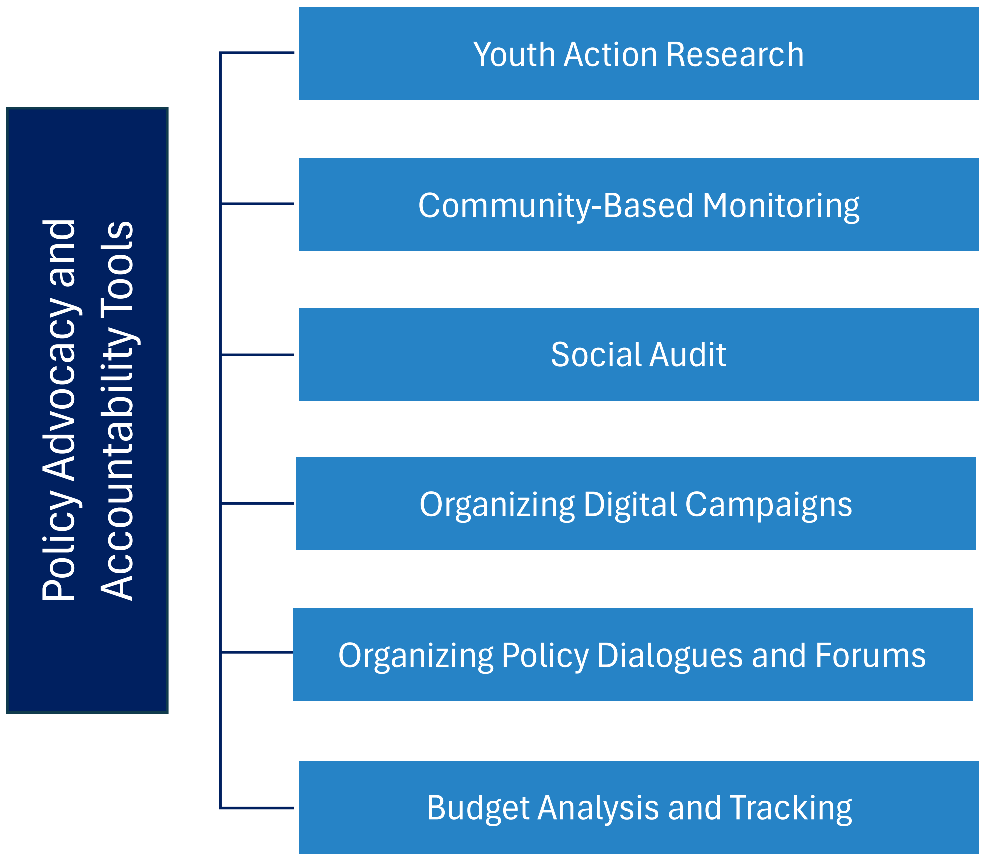

Figure 2: Advocacy and Accountability Tools Documented

Subsequent to the writeshop, PRIA further developed each tool into a standalone module within this toolkit. This resource is intended for use by current and future EOL grantees and partners, not only in the Asia-Pacific region but also in other regions engaged in youth-led policy advocacy and accountability.

How to Use This Toolkit?

This toolkit presents six practical tools that organizations, youth groups, and community-based initiatives can utilize to enhance youth-led policy advocacy and accountability initiatives. Four of these tools—Community-Based Monitoring, Social Audit, Budget Analysis and Tracking, and Youth Action Research—emphasize the engagement of communities, particularly youth, in generating data and evidence. These well-established approaches have been adapted here with a focus on education and youth engagement.

The remaining two tools—Organizing Digital Campaigns and Organizing Policy Dialogues/Forums—enable organizations to effectively mobilize, communicate, and influence decision-making processes through active youth involvement. These tools empower young people to advocate for change and hold stakeholders accountable. Each tool is presented as a step-by-step guide as described in Figure 3.

Overview: Purpose and relevance of the tool

Step-by-step process: Effective facilitation of the tool

Youth engagement: Meaningful involvement of youth

Impact and strategies: Effective engagement approaches

Challenges and solutions: Addressing barriers and overcoming them

Examples: Insights from diverse contexts

Figure 3: Content of the Tool

This toolkit serves as:

- A practical resource guide for organizations to design or integrate youth-led policy advocacy and accountability initiatives, thereby strengthening their work and strategies
- A capacity-building tool for youth leaders and community facilitators to learn, train, and apply these methods in their respective contexts

Users are encouraged to adapt these tools to their specific context, sector, or thematic focus. While the examples in this toolkit primarily pertain to education, the approaches are equally applicable to other sectors, including health, climate action, and governance.

Youth Action Research[1]

Overview

Youth Action Research (YAR) is a critical and inclusive methodology that empowers young individuals to assume roles as proactive agents of inquiry and transformation. Grounded in the principle of "no action without research; no research without action," YAR enables adolescents and youth, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to investigate the social conditions they encounter, identify systemic challenges, and initiate collaborative solutions. Drawing inspiration from the foundational concepts of Kurt Lewin and further developed by influential thinkers such as Paulo Freire, this approach aims to disrupt traditional hierarchies of knowledge creation by placing youth at the forefront of the research process. It emphasizes reflection, shared learning, and actionable outcomes, empowering young researchers to conduct inquiries that are relevant to their specific contexts and informed by their personal experiences.

Box 1: Primary Characteristics of Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- Participatory action research provides an alternative methodology for knowledge production that empowers community researchers and addresses local issues.
- It prioritizes participation and seeks to dismantle traditional hierarchies between researchers and participants in the research process.
- The approach is inherently collaborative, emphasizing that the sharing of diverse knowledge, skills, and talents is essential for fostering collective development. Central to this process are the concepts of co-learning and co-investigation, where individuals engage in shared exploration, questioning, and learning.
- Action-reflection serves as a fundamental learning method within this framework.
- The approach is subjective, recognizing that it is shaped by specific situations and contexts.
- It empowers marginalized communities by encouraging them to reflect on, understand, and document their lived experiences, thereby enhancing their voice and control over their circumstances.

The YAR initiative is designed to promote substantial engagement of youth in governance and decision-making processes, ensuring that their perspectives are acknowledged and valued. By generating community-based evidence, YAR aims to influence public policy in ways that align with the needs and aspirations of the marginalized community. The program also emphasizes the development of self-confidence, political awareness, and leadership skills among young individuals, empowering them to actively participate in societal development. Additionally, YAR addresses critical intersectional issues—including gender-based violence, caste discrimination, mental health challenges, and educational inequities—underscoring the necessity of an inclusive approach in both policy formulation and community action.

For instance, in Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) work, YAR has been strategically implemented with marginalized youth who are frequently excluded from decision-making spaces due

[1] *Youth Action Research (YAR) has been used by the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE)*

to factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status, caste, religion, disability, or geography. These initiatives have illustrated that when youth are provided with the necessary tools and platforms, they can generate meaningful knowledge, analyze structures of oppression, and mobilize action effectively.

Steps to Implement YAR

A. Problem Identification and Framing the Research Question

Prior to initiating any research, it is imperative for young changemakers to confront a fundamental question: "What specific change do we seek in our community?" Youth Action Research (YAR) is predicated on the understanding that meaningful and sustainable change arises when youth actively participate in identifying the issues that resonate with both them and their communities. This preliminary phase of defining the research agenda is vital, as it empowers young individuals to establish the focus of their inquiry, articulate its significance, and delineate their methodological approach. This process entails thorough reflection, constructive dialogue, and a commitment to shared objectives.

Figure 4: Phases in Youth Action Research

Through interactive sessions and peer discussions, the youth engage in brainstorming critical community issues, including access to education, clean water, safe public spaces, gender equity, and youth unemployment. They collaboratively prioritize their concerns and identify a key theme or set of questions that resonate both locally and personally. This approach ensures that the research is rooted in real-life experiences rather than being imposed externally. The facilitation provided by supportive organization members is essential in guiding these discussions toward productive outcomes.

B. Choosing and Designing the Right Tools for Data Collection

Once the research focus is established, the next step involves selecting appropriate methods for information collection. This process is not uniform; instead, it allows youth to explore and choose tools that align with their comfort levels, creativity, and community context, supported by organizations that provide practical guidance and training.

Some commonly employed participatory tools include:

- **Surveys and Questionnaires:** These are effective for quickly gathering data from a large number of individuals, particularly when comparing opinions or behaviors. Surveys can be administered online or on paper, featuring straightforward, jargon-free questions developed by the youth themselves.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** These are small, interactive group conversations that facilitate the emergence of diverse perspectives. Youth participants learn to moderate discussions, pose follow-up questions, and identify key themes.
- **One-on-One Interviews:** These interviews provide deeper insights into personal narratives or expert perspectives. Youth take on the role of interviewers, enhancing their confidence and developing active and respectful listening skills.
- **Photovoice:** This innovative tool enables youth to document their community's realities through photographs. Each image is paired with a narrative or message, creating a compelling visual account of local issues.
- **Community Mapping:** Youth create visual representations of their surroundings, highlighting resources (such as schools, clinics, and parks), areas of concern (including unsafe zones and inaccessible locations), and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. This practice often uncovers hidden inequalities in resource distribution.

Throughout this process, it is critical to educate and raise awareness among youth researchers about their responsibilities as researchers. Therefore, foundational training on the following topics is essential:

- **Aligning the research context:** Before beginning, it is important to clarify the key defining variables or aspects of the research context, as these will shape and align with the type of questions you ask.
- **Framing good questions:** Learning to formulate open-ended, unbiased, and purposeful questions.
- **Informed consent:** Ensuring that participants understand the purpose of the research and voluntarily agree to participate.
- **Privacy and ethics:** Managing information with sensitivity, particularly when working with vulnerable populations or personal narratives.

Table 1: Role of Various Actors in YAR

Stage	Role of the Youth	Role of the Support Organization
Preparation	Identify issues, participate in training	Facilitate, mentor, create safe spaces
Design	Select tools, co-develop methods	Provide technical input
Data Collection	Lead interviews, FGDs, observations	Ensure ethics, support logistics
Analysis	Interpret findings, make connections	Offer thematic guidance
Action/Engagement	Lead campaigns, meet stakeholders	Help build networks, advocacy coaching

C. Data Analysis, Report Writing, and Dissemination

Following the collection of data through methods such as surveys, FGDs, interviews, storytelling, photo voice, or community mapping, youth researchers engage in collaborative data analysis workshops. These workshops serve as essential platforms for young individuals to collectively interpret their findings, enabling the identification of common patterns, contradictions, emotional responses, and power dynamics within the data. The analysis typically involves thematic interpretation, allowing youth to examine stories, quotes, and observations organized around key themes. This process facilitates connections between their lived experiences and broader structural or societal issues, including inequality, gender norms, access to education, and environmental degradation. Additionally, participatory analysis fosters open dialogue and critical reflection among peers. During facilitated discussions, youth are encouraged to explore questions such as:

This analytical phase is also emotionally charged, recognizing that certain data points may elicit feelings of anger, hope, sadness, or pride. Rather than dismissing these emotions, they are acknowledged as valuable insights that can inform advocacy strategies.

"What patterns are we observing?"
"Whose perspectives are missing from the conversation?"
"How do our findings relate to existing policies or social narratives?"

Ultimately, youth consolidate their findings into accessible and creative formats such as reports, visual narratives, zines, infographics, policy briefs, or performances.

Box 2: Youth Report Cheat Sheet

- Kick It Off with Impact! Craft a catchy title that grabs attention, followed by 2–3 lines explaining why this topic is crucial.
- Your Key Questions: Outline the main inquiries you tackled during your research.
- Our Approach: Detail who you engaged with, and the methods used (like surveys, story circles, maps, etc.).
- Discoveries We Made: Share the top 3–5 insights you uncovered, feel free to incorporate quotes, doodles, or icons to illustrate your points.
- Why It Matters: Highlight the significance of these findings for the youth and the broader community.
- Next Steps: Propose 2–3 actionable steps or recommendations based on your insights.
- Make It Engaging: Include visuals such as charts, sketches, memes, or photos to add flair.
- Final Thoughts: Conclude with a memorable line that resonates with everyone.
- Remember, your report is both a narrative and a rallying cry. Make it bold, visual, and relatable for young people!

These outputs are articulated in their own voices, with the objective of influencing community dialogue, engaging stakeholders, and fostering efforts for systemic change.

Table 2: Methods of Dissemination of YAR Findings

Dissemination Method	Description
Youth-led forums and storytelling circles	Safe and inclusive environments where youth can share their research findings, lived experiences, and personal narratives with peers, community members, and stakeholders. These forums promote dialogue and encourage collective reflection.
Photo exhibitions, community screenings, podcasts	Visual and audio formats are utilized to present research insights through creative media, such as photo stories, short films, and audio narratives. These platforms enhance accessibility and emotional engagement with complex issues.
Policy briefs co-written by youth	Concise and actionable documents that translate research findings into policy recommendations. Authored by youth, these briefs elevate young voices within formal decision-making processes.
Local radio, wall newspapers, and street theatre	Cost-effective, high-impact strategies for engaging grassroots audiences. These traditional and community-based mediums facilitate the dissemination of findings in local languages and culturally appropriate formats.
Digital storytelling and social media campaigns	Youth utilize videos, graphics, reels, and posts to convey their narratives and emphasize key issues online. These campaigns broaden the reach of YAR findings to larger audiences while cultivating digital advocacy skills.

One of the challenges frequently encountered when engaging youth in dialogue with higher authorities is that they are often dismissed by adults as "emotional" or "immature." In response, the following strategies were proposed:

- Triangulate narratives with robust data
- Foster intergenerational alliances
- Provide training for youth in strategic communication and lobbying

Table 3: Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Challenge	Mitigation Strategies
High dropout or mobility of youth	Offer flexible timelines, create peer mentorship loops
Poor digital access or literacy	Use hybrid or low-tech tools; partner with local actors
Lack of research experience	Step-by-step training and learning-by-doing
Resistance from community leaders	Engage elders early, explain value of youth evidence
Language barriers	Use local dialects, images, theatre, and songs

The implementation of Youth Action Research (YAR) has led to significant transformations at multiple levels, despite ongoing scrutiny regarding the validation of its research processes. The impacts are as follows:

- **Individual level:** Enhanced self-esteem, improved communication skills, and increased leadership capacities among youth participants.
- **Community level:** The establishment of youth-led initiatives such as *Shodhini* Libraries in India and the Marginalized Youth Forum in Timor-Leste.
- **Institutional level:** Research findings have prompted improvements within educational institutions, including enhanced sanitation facilities and increased access to menstrual hygiene services.

- **Policy level:** Active youth participation in national forums has driven curriculum revisions and initiated discussions on education funding. This multifaceted impact underscores the vital role of youth engagement in fostering positive change across various sectors.

Considerations for YAR Implementation

- Young individuals often bring enthusiasm but may lack adequate preparation. It is essential to invest in structured, continuous training and mentorship programs. Incorporating storytelling, artistic expression, and practical exercises can significantly enhance their learning experience.
- The perspectives of youth represent valuable knowledge systems that warrant respect. When designing analytical methods, it is important to acknowledge and honor the emotional depth, nuances, and subjectivity inherent in their viewpoints.
- Youth should have shared ownership not only of the data but also of the decision-making process. Empowering them by allowing space for failure, fostering reflective practices, and celebrating their achievements strengthens their agency.
- Even modest initiatives, such as conducting a local survey or creating a mural in a library, can initiate significant systemic change, particularly when they are rooted in truth and widely disseminated.
- It is crucial to adapt methods to meet the specific needs of young people, utilizing available resources creatively and remaining flexible to evolving circumstances, such as the mental health challenges presented by the post-COVID landscape or issues related to digital access.

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Community Based Monitoring[2]

Overview

Governments worldwide allocate resources to various welfare programs for their citizens. Within the framework of governance, there is a significant emphasis on compliance, quality, equity, and efficiency. However, the benefits received by marginalized groups often fall short of expectations. There is a growing recognition globally that strengthening the 'demand-side' of governance is crucial for enhancing the accountability of the supply side, fortifying public institutions, reducing corruption and the misallocation of public funds, and improving public service delivery.

To address these shortcomings and enhance citizen engagement in governance, particularly in sectors such as education, community-based monitoring (CBM) tools are becoming increasingly important.

CBM serves as a participatory instrument designed to empower community groups, youth networks, and civil society actors to strengthen education systems. By facilitating grassroots-level data collection, this tool enables users to generate evidence and identify gaps in service delivery within the education sector. It allows citizen groups or communities to monitor the implementation and performance of public services and assess their impact, often according to indicators they have selected. This evaluation determines whether and to what extent services are effectively delivered and policies are implemented.

By facilitating regular feedback and oversight, CBM aligns services with local realities and enhances public accountability (Community-Based Monitoring, Participedia).

In this process, service users—including students, parents, and community members—evaluate the effectiveness, quality, accessibility, and impact of public programs and services. A fundamental principle of CBM is that communities themselves determine what to monitor and how to utilize the collected data (The Global Fund, 2020). By capturing real-time experiences from the ground, this tool supports efforts to more effectively influence education policies and programs. It can be employed to assess and monitor government performance, enabling communities to hold public systems accountable for fulfilling education commitments. Furthermore, by generating reliable and relevant educational data that informs regional or national planning, budgeting, and monitoring systems, the tool ensures that communities maintain ownership and control over the utilization of this data (A Guide to Community-Based Monitoring, Reporting and Verification, WWF-Guianas, 2020).

In addition to improving service delivery, CBM promotes community empowerment by raising awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities. It cultivates a culture of shared accountability between the state and its citizens, encouraging inclusive participation in governance processes. Moreover, CBM offers a cost-effective means to build community capacity and deepen democratic engagement. (Community-Based Monitoring, Participedia).

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[2] *EOL-supported grantees, such as Karkhana Samuha, Information on Informatics and Development, and the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms, have used community-based monitoring tools.*

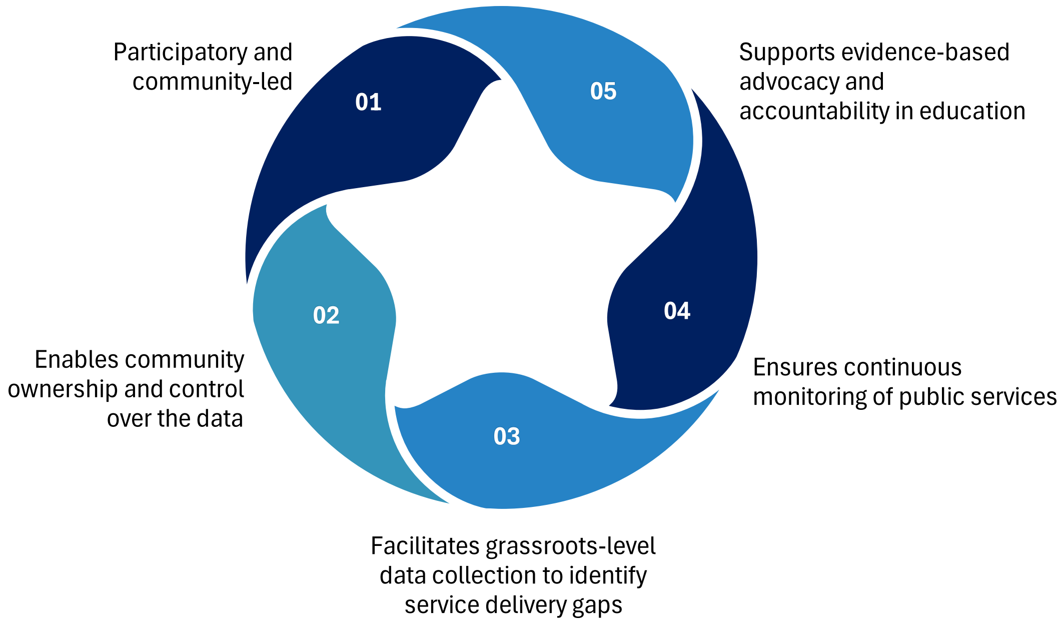

Figure 5: Key Characteristics of CBM

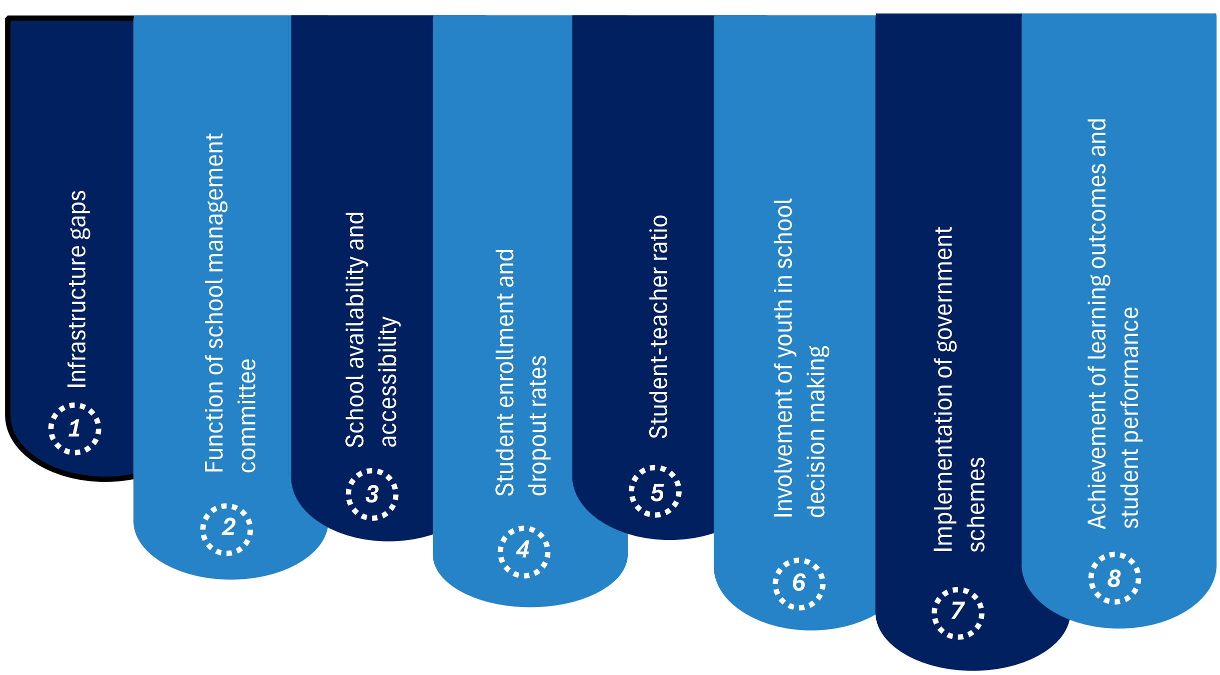

Figure 6: Key Issues Explored through CBM Tool

Steps for Designing and Facilitating Community-Based Monitoring

A. Preparatory Stage

Step 1: Establish clear objectives and purpose – Begin by defining the primary objective of the CBM initiative, which often arises from significant issues or widespread dissatisfaction among citizens regarding a particular public service. Clearly articulate the specific aspects to be monitored and the rationale behind this choice. At this stage, it is essential to formulate key questions and determine the desired outcomes in collaboration with the community.

Step 2: Identify focus areas and indicators– Develop a comprehensive list of indicators alongside the specific areas to be assessed and monitored. This process requires continuous engagement with the community to effectively identify these areas. It may involve multiple rounds of discussions to accurately prioritize key issues. It is advisable to concentrate on a limited number of indicators for effective monitoring.

Step 3: Select the appropriate methodology – There are various tools and methods available for conducting community-based monitoring, each with a distinctive purpose. Some of the most commonly employed tools include:

> ***Citizen Report Cards (CRCs)[3]:*** Participatory survey tools designed to collect user feedback on the performance of public services. This feedback is utilized to enhance public accountability through media coverage and advocacy by civil society. CRCs are particularly valuable in contexts where demand-side data regarding user perceptions of service quality and satisfaction is insufficient.
>
> ***Community Scorecards (CSCs)[4]:*** Tools that gather perceptions from both users and service providers regarding the quality, efficiency, and transparency of services. They facilitate tracking of inputs and expenditures, monitor service quality, establish benchmark performance criteria for budgeting, and enable comparisons of performance across facilities or regions. CSCs empower service users to provide structured feedback to providers and assist government institutions in gaining direct insights from communities about effective practices and areas needing improvement.
>
> ***Participatory Performance Monitoring (PFM)[5]:*** A participatory instrument to collect data on specific aspect of a service by the community in regular intervals. The data is shared and dialogues are organized with the service providers regularly with an objective to improve access, quality, affordability and reliability of the service over a period of time.

Select a methodology that aligns with the specific context of the community and the objectives of your monitoring initiative.

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[3] Social Accountability in Education through Citizen's Report Card
[4] Community Score Card to Enhance Public Service for the Poor
[5] Participatory Monitoring for Accountability in Montenegro - Second Round of Post-2015 Consultations

Step 4: Developing tool guides – After finalizing the tool, create a comprehensive guide or module to facilitate consistent data collection and analysis. This guide should delineate key steps, indicators, and protocols to ensure standardization and clarity throughout the process.

Step 5: Stakeholder analysis and engagement – Engage the community and relevant stakeholders early in the process. Start by conducting a stakeholder analysis to identify key actors, followed by initiating engagement with them. Organize consultations to help shape the monitoring framework and ensure that the tool aligns with the community's needs and priorities. Maintaining ongoing, two-way communication with the community throughout the development process is essential. These interactions are also vital for mobilizing community members for the subsequent phases of the CBM process.

Step 6: Setting timelines – Establish a clear timeline outlining expected outcomes for training, data collection, and reporting. These timelines should be developed in consultation with community members to ensure feasibility and alignment with their schedules.

Step 7: Capacity building of local youth – Provide training for local youth in data collection and analysis, empowering them to lead monitoring activities effectively. Organize Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions for youth leaders to ensure their active involvement in addressing identified issues and incorporating youth perspectives. For example, in Bangladesh, the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) trains youth teams on MEAL (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning), including tools such as FGDs, surveys, Gantt charts, and task calendars. These teams then apply the tools to identify local issues and develop action plans.

Step 8: Securing permissions – Engaging with local communities and institutions for data collection typically necessitates obtaining permissions. Acquire the necessary approvals, such as No Objection Certificates (NoCs), from relevant authorities prior to commencing fieldwork.

Step 9: Pilot testing and refinement - Implement a pilot test to evaluate the tool's usability and accuracy, ensuring active participation from the community. Reassess initial objectives, indicators, and methodologies to confirm their relevance and alignment with on-ground realities. The pilot should be conducted in collaboration with the youth who will facilitate the tool in the field.

Step 10: Logistical arrangements – Coordinate all necessary logistical support, including stationery, refreshments, venue setup, and printed materials (e.g., question guides), to ensure smooth implementation of the monitoring process for both youth and the community. The chosen methodology will also impact the specific logistical arrangements required.

B. Implementation Stage

Step 11: Engaging local partners – Collaborate with local grassroots organizations or institutions to ensure effective coordination and implementation. Partnering with these entities provides access to established community groups with whom they have strong relationships. This collaboration also facilitates the integration of identified issues into their ongoing community efforts.

Step 12: Facilitating youth engagement – Actively involve community members, particularly youth, to ensure meaningful participation and reliable data collection. Provide continuous guidance, timely feedback, and close supervision to the youth involved in field data collection.

Step 13: Analyzing the findings and developing reports – Once data is collected, systematically compile and analyze it to generate comprehensive reports for stakeholder sharing and advocacy purposes. Aggregate the findings to identify trends, performance gaps, and areas of strength or concern. Present key findings in formats that are accessible to a broader audience, utilizing infographics, summary tables, and visuals to enhance understanding.

C. Follow-up Stage

Step 14: Organize data validation workshop – Present findings to the community. Encourage community members to validate the interpretation of findings, identify key issues, and brainstorm potential solutions. This process fosters community ownership and promotes constructive engagement with authorities.

Step 15: Organize stakeholder conversations – Facilitate meetings to present and discuss findings with service providers to collaboratively develop actionable solutions. These discussions create both pressure and opportunities for concrete commitments to enhance service delivery.

Step 16: Identifying and addressing implementation gaps – Reflect on challenges encountered during implementation and make necessary adjustments. Incorporate feedback to strengthen both the monitoring tool and the overall process.

Step 17: Tracking commitments and driving action – Conduct regular follow-ups to encourage service providers and stakeholders to act on the findings. Continue engaging youth throughout the process. Advocate for the institutionalization of CBM tools at both community and government levels to ensure they become integral mechanisms in public service evaluation and accountability.

Role of Youth in the CBM Process

A. Preparation Stage

- Engage youth representatives in community consultations and stakeholder mapping exercises.
- Incorporate their feedback into the design of the monitoring tool; encourage their participation in co-creating the tool.
- Conduct capacity-building sessions to equip youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools for effective involvement in the CBM process.

B. Implementation Stage

- Involve youth in the data collection process to ensure grassroots-level insights are captured.
- Engage them in data analysis and in generating evidence to inform community-led recommendations.
- Mobilize youth to raise awareness within communities and support outreach efforts.

C. Follow-up Stage

- Facilitate youth participation in reviewing and refining the CBM tool based on implementation learnings.
- Encourage youth-led advocacy to demand accountability from government and service providers.
- Support their role in presenting findings, securing commitments, and ensuring the CBM process reflects the lived realities of their communities.

Insights Emerging from the Implementation of CBM

The implementation of the CBM tool offers valuable analyses and insights into education policy and governance, particularly through youth-led engagement at the local level. Key findings include:

Communication gaps: A significant communication gap exists between policymakers and local communities, underscoring the necessity for more participatory, bottom-up approaches in education governance.

Policy implementation and service delivery gaps: The tool effectively identifies existing gaps in policy implementation and service delivery. It enables communities and stakeholders to explore methods for contextualizing and decentralizing policies, rendering them more responsive to local needs and realities.

Budget allocation issues: The CBM process can reveal deficiencies in budget allocations, including insufficient funding, lack of transparency in fund utilization, and ineffective implementation mechanisms.

Limited community participation in policy development: The process highlights the lack of community engagement in policy formulation and emphasizes the importance of incorporating community insights to enhance the effectiveness of implementation.

Inclusive consultations through youth engagement: Engaging youth and communities facilitates more inclusive and grounded consultations. Youth can help bridge language and accessibility barriers, making processes more relatable and effective.

Reinforcing mutual accountability: The CBM process underscores the significance of mutual accountability, extending not only from government to citizens but also from communities back to public systems and service providers.

Engaging Decision-Makers and Other Stakeholders

The CBM process facilitates the collection of valuable information regarding community experiences and the delivery of public services. The data gathered and analyzed serves as a rich resource for engaging decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders. Several effective strategies can enhance this engagement, including:

- Development of policy briefs and their presentation during stakeholder forums and consultations, such as Local Education Group (LEG) meetings.
- Submission of memorandums and charters of demand by youth and community members to relevant service providers and decision-makers, which highlight specific issues and proposed actions.
- Design and utilization of infographics, reports, scorecards, and position papers to present key findings in an accessible and engaging manner. These tools promote wider communication and a better understanding of the issues.

- Organization of open appeals, Public Interest Litigations (PILs), and public hearings to increase visibility and demand accountability from institutions.
- Creation of public pressure through strategic visibility efforts to ensure that key issues receive the attention they deserve.

Effective Strategies for Facilitating CBM Tool

Engage local youth – The engagement of local youth and communities is vital for effective monitoring and advocacy. Young people are actively involved in community processes and seek meaningful participation, not just as passive listeners, but as contributors to decisions that affect their lives, both now and in the future. Since public service delivery, particularly in education, directly impacts them, they often have a deeper understanding of the issues. Moreover, involving local youth helps build trust and rapport with community members, as they are from the community and are seen as familiar and trusted individuals.

Contextualize issues and align with local systems – The tool's success depends on tailoring issues to local realities, aligning with government planning cycles, and localizing tools and strategies. For example, adapt interview strategies to focus on informed individuals, such as teachers, NGO staff, government workers, and educated youth, who can provide deeper insights through key informant interviews (KIIs). As part of the baseline assessment, consult a few families to confirm the relevance of proposed interventions, using their feedback to refine action plans before implementation.

Leverage accountability mechanisms and ensure follow-up – Utilize existing government accountability frameworks while also establishing strong follow-up systems to monitor commitments and actions.

Integrate risk management and actionability – Develop a risk management matrix and ensure that identified actions are both trackable and actionable, enhancing the tool's credibility and impact.

Challenges to Facilitate CBM

Language barriers – Localize the monitoring tool and engage local youth who are proficient in the community's language to facilitate data collection and engagement.

Mobility and safety concerns – Provide gender-sensitive arrangements, such as transportation allowances, to ensure participation without risk.

Discomfort in mixed-gender or hierarchical settings – Conduct confidence-building sessions and establish separate, safe spaces for participants to express themselves freely.

Administrative hurdles and bureaucratic delays – Secure endorsements from higher-level authorities and provide official identification to field staff to facilitate access and cooperation from local entities.

Community resistance and lack of trust – Involve community members in the implementation team, ensure transparency in objectives, and regularly share information to build credibility. Some respondents, particularly from the education sector, may be reluctant to share sensitive information. Questions on skills and employment often yield limited responses due to discomfort or lack of awareness.

Engaging women – Reaching women poses additional challenges, as they may not feel safe or may not recognize issues such as domestic abuse as gender-based violence. Assign female interviewers and invest time in building trust. These challenges underscore the need for ongoing sensitization and safe, inclusive engagement strategies.

Poor facilitation – Ensure effective facilitation of the tools. Ineffective facilitation can lead to misunderstandings or tensions, increasing the risk of conflict between citizens and government representatives or service providers.

Impact of a Successful CBM Process

The tool enhances transparency and accountability in education governance by facilitating community feedback and empowering both youth and the broader community to engage in governance processes. It aims to improve collaboration with government entities and contributes to the documentation of the Right to Education (RTE). Additionally, it influences policy changes at both national and local levels and integrates community perspectives into planning and implementation, thereby fostering a more participatory and equitable governance framework.

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Social Audit[6]

Foundations of Social Audit

In recent times, the call for greater transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance has sparked the development of various tools for civic engagement. One standout innovation in this arena is the Social Audit. This Tool Guide is designed to guide the CSO partners to engage and empower youth to play an active role in social audits, serving as a powerful means of advocacy and promoting social accountability.

Audit is a word associated with the notion of accountability. Traditionally, audits have been mainly about financial assessments. However, this idea has evolved to include a more social dimension, leading us to what is known as a social audit. This process reflects vital principles like transparency, accountability, and participation enabling communities to review the services, pledges and claims made by public institutions. Unlike standard audits conducted by bureaucrats or third-party organizations, social audits are rooted in the community. They create a platform for individuals, especially those affected by various development policies or services, to determine if these efforts truly fulfill their promises. This approach empowers citizens to check government statements, scrutinize how public resources are allocated and utilized, and insist on increased accountability (PRIA International Academy, 2013).

Community Education Watch, a grassroots social audit initiative under CAMPE in Bangladesh, has been making strides since its launch in 2009. This program empowers communities to actively monitor primary education by keeping tabs on factors like enrolment, attendance, governance, and resource allocation. Its mission is clear: to push for greater school accountability and improvements. Over the years, it has fostered local ownership, lowered dropout rates, championed inclusivity, and even made an impact on national education policy. This journey demonstrates how social audits can transform citizen participation from a mere concept into a dynamic practice grounded in informed and active involvement.

The key principles of Social Audit include:

- **Participation:** Everyone affected, especially the most marginalized, should be part of the process.
- **Transparency:** All relevant documents and data must be accessible and intelligible.
- **Equity and inclusion:** Focus on those often excluded from mainstream decision-making.
- **Action and change orientation:** Findings must translate into advocacy and positive change.
- **Evidence-based dialogue:** A combination of qualitative and quantitative data ensures a holistic view.

[6] EOL-supported grantees, such as, the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), Bangladesh; the Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS), Pakistan; and the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh have used social audit as a tool for accountability and citizen engagement.

The effectiveness of social audits hinge on the willingness of both the user community and the governing or implementing agency to collaborate in conducting a social audit. The community must be ready to ask questions about the program's implementation and have the motivation and capability to do so. Similarly, the officials from the relevant institutions should be open to addressing the concerns and inquiries of the user community. Typically, a regular audit is a top-down process that focuses on compliance with established procedures, rules, and the appropriateness of expenditures. In contrast, a social audit aims to assess service efficiency from the users' perspective, making it a bottom-up process.

A social audit captures the 'need for expenditure', 'verification of expenditure', 'usefulness of expenditure', 'quality of work' and most importantly, 'justice for marginalized sections of people'. As a result of social audit, the community develops trust in government programs and a sense of ownership in their implementation.

Source: NITI Aayog & UNDP, 2015

This participatory and empowering approach ensures that citizen participation is not confined to periodic voting, but is a daily practice rooted in informed and active citizenship.

What is it?	It is a process to establish accountability. It empowers the community to ask questions and demand answers from the implementing agency.
Who will do it?	It is an audit of a program or project implemented by an agency.
What is its scope?	It examines physical, financial and process-related issues. Both quantitative and qualitative inputs are publicly verified.
Why is it done?	It can suggest directions for developing further strategies, leading to improved implementation of the program, more transparency, community participation, and greater trust between the community and government.

Figure 7: Steps for Facilitating Community-Based Monitoring
Adapted from: NITI Aayog & UNDP, 2015

In certain countries in the region, social audits have been made mandatory for specific development programs. For example, in India, conducting social audits is mandatory for national programs like the National Rural Employment Guarantee, Housing, Sanitation, and the Integrated Child Development Scheme. Established procedures involve local governments. However, in many other countries, civil society groups have used social audits to demand accountability in various interventions. The steps for conducting social audits described here have been synthesized from both experiences.

Steps to Social Audit

A. Planning and Preparation

Step 1 – Defining the objective: Every social audit starts with careful planning. First, it is essential to identify a specific government education program and specific subject areas that require examination, whether it is school infrastructure, sanitation services, nutrition services, or digital inclusion. After determining the focus area, it is important to outline clear objectives. For example, an objective might be to ensure that girl students can access clean and functioning toilets or to investigate the reasons behind irregular mid-day meal services. All pertinent information about the program should be collected to ensure that the audit is meaningful. I-SAPS[7] implements social audit methods in the education sector by methodically assessing school facilities, teacher presence, and budget usage to ensure resources are utilized effectively. It collects input from students and parents to pinpoint gaps in service delivery and gain a clearer understanding of community needs. This information is then leveraged to engage local education officials and push for specific enhancements in education service delivery. Furthermore, I-SAPS encourages citizen-driven education initiatives and creates district-level scorecards, allowing communities to monitor progress, hold authorities accountable, and promote reforms based on evidence.

Step 2 – Establishing and capacitating a Youth Social Audit team: Next, a Youth Audit Team should be established, with a commitment to diversity in representation. It is vital to include young women, LGBTQIA+ youth, youth living with disabilities, and individuals from marginalized communities. Ideally, these young people should receive training in data collection, documentation and facilitating participatory methods and conflict management with the community along with steps for conducting social audit. Team members must be made aware of gender issues, including the attendance of girls and the fact that they often receive less food in mid-day meals compared to boys. Additionally, they should be educated about the challenges faced by marginalized communities. For example, IID, Bangladesh based organization, adopts a hybrid training model to build the capacity of the Youth Social Audit team. Core sessions are conducted online, while participants complete offline assignments to apply tools in practical contexts. Pre- and post-assessments are used to track learning, and certificates are awarded based on performance. This model supports both flexibility and practical skill development.

Step 3 – Stakeholder mapping and sensitization: Mapping out stakeholders is another key step. Identifying the powerholders, gatekeepers, allies, and potential resistors will guide the team in creating an effective engagement strategy. This group could include local authorities, school staff, parent-teacher associations, local leaders, and community-based organizations. Sensitization of all the stakeholders towards the purpose of social audit is critical for its success. IID carries out stakeholder mapping to identify key individuals such as doctors, teachers, Union Parishad Chairmen, elected female members, youth, and local women. And engages with them early on to build trust and ownership. These stakeholders are then sensitized on the purpose of the audit, their roles, and how findings may improve service delivery and governance. Early engagement helps build trust and community ownership.

Step 4 – Informing the officials: The implementing agency should take ownership of the social audit process, as they are responsible for taking corrective actions. Therefore, fostering this sense of ownership and securing their

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[7] The Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS), founded in 2008 in Pakistan, is a think tank focused on research, advocacy, and capacity-building in education, governance, and development.

support is essential for successful social audits. Their cooperation is vital for accessing all necessary records and data required for verification. Additionally, it is advisable to keep departmental officials at the district and provincial levels informed whenever possible. Writing a formal letter to the district authorities outlining the objectives of the audit, and to seek their consent and advice prior to the research helps build transparency and secure their cooperation.

B. Implementation

Step 5 – Collecting and organizing records and data: A social audit is a fact-finding process that involves careful verification of records. For example, the number of students participating in the mid-day meal scheme in the school should match the figures in the attendance register, and the actual count of completed toilets in a school should align with the Management Information System (MIS) records. Effective fact-finding relies on accurate records. The social audit should specifically address issues affecting girls and marginalized communities, such as whether girls receive the same quantity of food in the mid-day meal scheme.

The team must engage with students and parents and visit the school to evaluate performance on the ground. Additionally, team members should compile and analyze the information in the records, verifying this data through physical checks, interviews, and document reviews. The verification process should be conducted systematically. Data collected from school records must be cross-checked with field facts and validated to eliminate any misinformation. This verification process should focus on concrete evidence rather than relying on perceptions.

Data collection is where the audit becomes tangible. Youth teams conduct surveys, interviews, and FGDs, and make observations. Emphasis must be laid on participatory methods that ensure community members, especially women and adolescents, feel safe and heard. Safety protocols must be followed, particularly for young women and LGBTQIA+ members. Establishing buddy systems, setting up emergency contacts, and identifying safe zones are all essential steps. Documentation should be detailed and rigorous. Whether it is a field diary, audio recording, or photographs, every piece of evidence must be ethically collected and stored.

Step 6 – Verification and analysis: Verification is an impartial and ethically responsible process of authenticating facts, carried out through physical checks, oral testimonies, and financial record reviews. This verification of data and information is essential in a social audit process. Verification involves checking the field data against official records, which can include things like school attendance logs, budget papers, government notices, or facility audit results. It is important to use multiple data sources to confirm our findings and ensure their credibility. The analysis should be led by the youth, with facilitators supporting them along the way.

> ***Physical verification:*** Physical verification occurs on-site to confirm actual conditions, such as the number of students present in a class or the quantity of toilets constructed. During a social audit verification process, team members, along with parents, should visit the school to assess the situation firsthand. They must review all necessary documents to compare the recorded data with the actual circumstances on the ground. The verification process should determine whether the services provided align with what is documented and adhere to the school's guidelines and procedures. If it proves challenging to follow established procedures in practice, it is advisable to engage with the community for their feedback on the matter.
>
> ***Oral verification:*** Focused group discussions will be held with students and parents to gather data for verification purposes. The testimonies from both students and parents should address various aspects,

including the quality and quantity of work completed, the materials used, the regularity of classes, and the provision of mid-day meals. If there are discrepancies in the testimonies, with some students or parents contradicting others, a more in-depth verification will be necessary. Oral verification aims to determine whether procedural norms have been followed, seeking answers to questions such as: Did the teacher arrive at school on time, etc.?

Financial verification: This involves confirming financial data from records, such as the actual status of purchases reflected in bills and vouchers. For instance, verifying the purchase of grains and other edible items for mid-day meals using the associated bills.

Step 7 – Preparing a verification report: The primary task of the social audit team is to create a document that reflects the observations and analyses from the verification process, which includes reviewing documents, conducting physical measurements, and gathering oral testimonies. This report will address all critical aspects of program delivery, particularly the community's perceptions regarding the quality, quantity, and usefulness of the structures created and services provided. To enhance clarity and comprehension, the audit report should incorporate visuals such as charts, infographics, and timelines.

The findings from the verification process should be shared with the affected individuals, enabling them to present their case during a specially convened Public Hearing. Additionally, the team, in collaboration with school authorities, should display these findings in public spaces to ensure the community has access to the information and is prepared to discuss the issues at the Public Hearing.

Step 8 – Community validation and advocacy through Public Hearing: A Public Hearing should be held where findings are shared publicly. Innovative formats like wall charts, theatre performances, or storytelling can help in making the information engaging. Public Hearing is an essential part of the social audit process. Therefore, the community should be informed about:

- The date and time of the Public Hearing
- The venue of the Public Hearing
- The specific agenda of the Public Hearing

The Charter of Demands is then collectively developed, outlining key asks backed by evidence. These are then used to engage with decision-makers in school committees, local governments, or district-level departments.

Youth can also use the audit to participate in Local Education Group meetings, public hearings, or one-on-one policy briefings. The aim is to shift from data collection to actionable advocacy.

C. Follow-Up

Step 9: Monitoring the Decisions – Decisions made during the Public Hearing should result in tangible corrective actions. It is beneficial for school authorities to make majority of these decisions, as they can be implemented quickly and easily. Any unresolved issues should be escalated to the relevant departments for further action. This approach will help build community trust in social audits.

A response matrix can be used to track promises made by officials. Youth collectives can also become part of School Management Committees or local monitoring bodies, ensuring that the audit process is institutionalized rather than episodic.

Creating annual calendars for social audits and building youth capacity to maintain them ensures sustainability. Regular community feedback sessions, public dashboards, and social media storytelling are innovative ways to keep the momentum alive.

Box 3: Enabling Factors for Successful Public Hearing

To ensure that a Public Hearing is participatory and engaging, the following conditions should be met:

- Schedule the Public Hearing at a time that accommodates the majority of the community.
- Choose a venue that is accessible to individuals from all religions and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Specifically invite women and marginalized groups, ensuring they have designated seating.
- Provide adequate notice of the Public Hearing in advance, along with the agenda.
- Ensure that all agenda items are addressed and that relevant documents and records are presented by the team and involved officials.
- Systematically record the proceedings and decisions to facilitate follow-up actions.

Challenges in Implementation

The "culture of silence" is one of the most pervasive challenges. Often, individuals do not raise issues unless personally affected. This silence stems from low awareness, fear of authority, and systemic dependency. Social audits must actively break this silence through empathy, storytelling, and collective action.

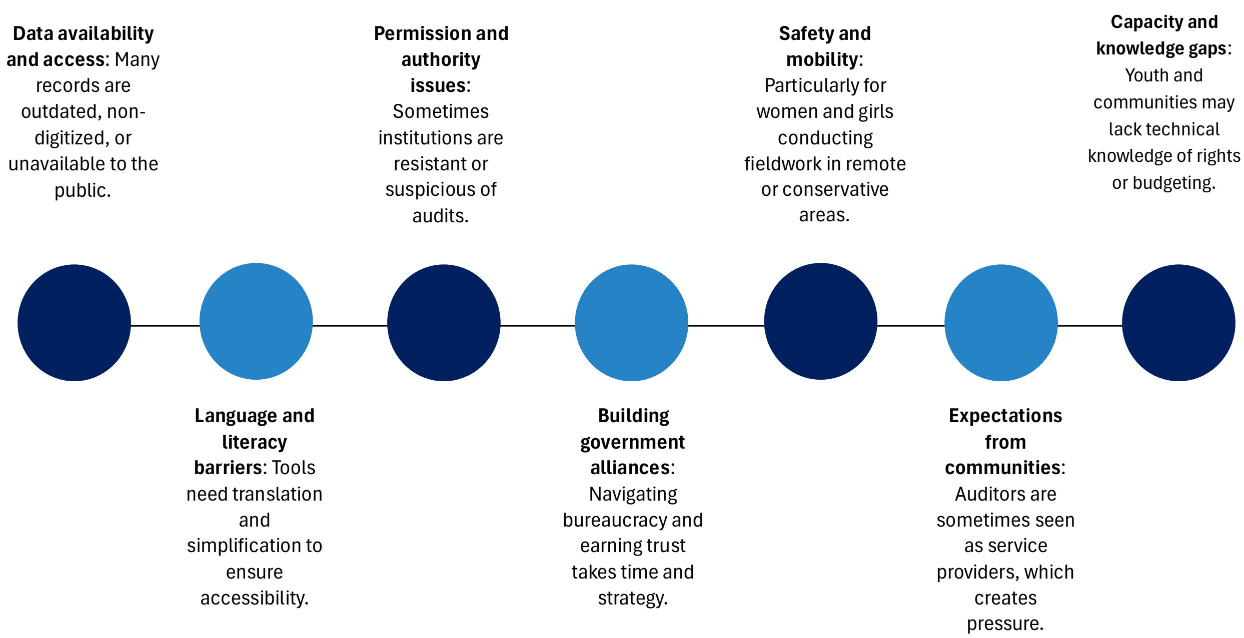

Figure 8: Challenges in Implementing Social Audits

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- Community Education Watch is a community-led social audit initiative under CAMPE in Bangladesh.

Budget Analysis and Tracking[8]

Overview

Democracy, as a system of governance, requires the state to be responsive to the needs and concerns of its citizens, many of whom may be impoverished, uneducated, and in need of social welfare services, particularly in developing countries. The state must be held accountable for failing to meet the essential and fundamental expectations of its citizens (Manual on Social Accountability: Concepts & Tools, CBGA, 2012).

One effective approach to ensuring accountability is through the Budget Analysis and Tracking Tool. 'Budget Analysis' encompasses the examination of figures within the government's budget, including revenue, allocation, and expenditure details. This analysis may incorporate data presented in the budget itself or in supplementary government reports, such as in-year or end-of-year audit reports (FAO, 2009). Conversely, Public Expenditure/Budget Tracking is utilized to monitor the flow of funds from higher levels of government through relevant ministries, government departments, and implementing agencies down to the end-users. For instance, it tracks whether funds allocated for classroom construction reach the school level and are utilized appropriately for that purpose.

The tool is designed to present financial information clearly, enabling various stakeholders to engage in discussions regarding the sources of funding and its allocation. It allows the end-users of resources to reconcile incoming funds with expenditures, thereby assisting both officials and citizens in understanding their budgetary entitlements. Moreover, it enables them to evaluate whether public funds are being utilized for their intended purposes (Social Accountability and Citizenship, PRIA, n.d.).

In summary, this tool is employed to assess the efficiency, equity, and responsiveness of education budgets/ allocations, evaluating whether they effectively meet the needs of learners, educators, and communities. It also aids in generating evidence to support budget advocacy, particularly by identifying discrepancies between budget allocations and actual expenditures.

This tool is particularly beneficial for:

- ***Understanding the utilization of education budgets,*** *including the extent to which allocated funds are fully expended and effectively employed (does not, however, explain the reasons or bottlenecks behind delayed expenditure or insufficient utilization.)*
- ***Analyzing overall trends in allocations for a specific sector,*** *including a review of both recurring and development budgets, as well as allocations across various components (primary, secondary, and higher secondary).*
- ***Assessing allocations for marginalized groups*** *to determine whether sufficient resources are dedicated to their needs.*
- ***Identifying gender disparities*** *in both budget allocations and spending patterns.*
- ***Evaluating the alignment of non-salary education budgets*** *with school-level requirements and priorities.*

[8] EOL-supported grantees, including the I-SAPS, CYAN, and NEW Indonesia, have been using budget tracking and analysis tools.

- ***Revealing inconsistencies in budget data*** *and unequal regional distributions.*
- ***Exposing corruption, conflicts of interest,*** *and* ***imbalanced prioritization across various education levels (primary, secondary, tertiary)****.*
- ***Enhancing youth and community participation*** *in budget planning and monitoring , and ensuring their perspectives are included in the agenda*
- ***Supporting evidence-based policy recommendations*** *and financial interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes.*

Steps for Facilitating Budget Analysis and Tracking

A. Planning

Step 1: Identify the issue – The first step involves clearly defining the objective of the budget analysis and tracking process. It is essential to have a precise understanding of the specific aspects to be reviewed. For example, in the Indonesian context, budget tracking analysis has been conducted to provide evidence for the judicial review process of the national education system law. In Pakistan, education budget tracking and analysis are carried out to identify allocation trends, gaps, and inconsistencies, thereby generating evidence for civil society and communities. This evidence enables civil society actors to engage in social accountability initiatives using government data.

Step 2: Identify the sources of data – Various sources of information are available regarding the budget. The first task is to pinpoint these sources (e.g., financial reports, including budget documents, economic surveys, audit reports, etc.) and the different levels (local, district, and national) from which data can be collected. This will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of budget allocation and expenditure within the education sector. Furthermore, it is important to identify the relevant ministries and programs associated with the sector and the identified issue.

Table 4: Important Country-specific Education Budget Documents to Review

Name of the Country	Name of the Document
Indonesia	General Budget Policy (KUA) and Temporary Budget Priorities and Ceilings (PPAS) 2022–2025; Regional Budget (Appendices I, II, III) 2022–2024; Regional Budget Realization 2022–2023; Regional Budget Draft 2025; Bogor Regency Educational Profile Book 2024
Pakistan	Federal and Provincial Yearly Budget Books; Economic Survey of Pakistan; Public Financing of Education in Pakistan: Analysis of Federal, Provincial and District Budgets
Sri Lanka	The Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance, Policy, and Economic Development has prepared a summary of the main components of the budget. Please note that education in Sri Lanka is a devolved subject; however, as provincial council elections have not been held, all councils are currently under the control of the central government. For detailed information on budget allocations for each sector, please refer to the following link: treasury.gov.lk/api/file/91bae993-5489-4dda-9c19-74d8f5dc4439

Tajikistan	Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on the State Budget of the Republic of Tajikistan; Budget for the National Education Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan until 2030; Medium-term action plans for this strategy (three years)

Step 3: Understanding the budget – It is essential to clarify the budget in a manner that facilitates comprehension, enabling effective reading and interpretation. At this stage, it is also crucial to identify the methods through which the budget should be analyzed. Various analytical approaches can be employed, depending on the specific goals. Some of the primary methods include (Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, 2012):

Analyzing budget policies: This involves a thorough examination of the fiscal and economic assumptions underlying the government's budget proposals. This process aids in understanding the anticipated impact of the budget on the government's deficit targets, as well as economic outcomes such as inflation, growth, and employment.

Sectoral analysis: This assessment typically evaluates the adequacy of allocations to a particular sector, comparing these allocations with investments in other sectors. Additionally, it may involve comparing spending levels across different countries.

Analysis through specific lenses: This approach entails a comprehensive examination of the extent to which the government utilizes the budget to deliver socio-economic rights to various disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities). This includes analyzing expenditures on various programs and budgetary strategies implemented by relevant government departments.

Trend analysis: This type of analysis illustrates the upward or downward movement of spending levels over a specific period, typically focusing on budget allocations aimed at addressing deficits in particular sectors.

Revenue analysis: A commonly conducted aspect of budget analysis, this focuses on expenditures in the social sector. However, it is important to acknowledge that tax policies also have a significant redistributive impact on society. Revenue analysis includes examining tax contributions, quantifying revenue lost due to tax breaks or evasion, and assessing the fairness of the tax system.

Step 4: Community and youth consultations – Engaging youth and community members in the budget process fosters understanding, participation, local ownership, and social accountability. Structured training should build budget literacy, data collection skills, and knowledge of the legal, policy, and governance frameworks shaping education financing. Participants should learn about institutional roles at federal, provincial, and district levels, the education budget cycle, resource flows, and common execution bottlenecks. They should also develop skills to interpret educational data and key performance indicators, enabling them to assess allocations, identify gaps, and advocate for equitable reforms. This will empower them to involve local communities in informed budget discussions.

B. Implementation

Step 5: Analyze the budget – Collaborate with youth to examine the available budget data and reports. Evaluate line-item allocations, trends, patterns, and gaps. Assess the availability of funds allocated to the identified issues.

Step 6: Engage local communities and stakeholders – Collaborate with local youth and communities to identify existing gaps and assess on-the-ground realities. Together with the community, brainstorm strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the budget. Consider utilizing engaging and interactive mediums to involve local stakeholders, such as teachers and principals.

Step 7: Prepare the report – Analyze and document the insights gathered. Prepare a comprehensive report to present the findings. The report should incorporate bar graphs, infographics, and charts to convey technical information from the budget in a more accessible format. Emphasize key gaps, recommendations, and trends.

Step 8: Organize dialogues and forums – Facilitate dialogues or forums by inviting key decision-makers, duty bearers, and relevant authorities to share their insights. Utilize this platform to discuss and strategize methods for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the budget process. Deliberate on subsequent steps and establish follow-up mechanisms. Engage local and national media to cover the forum and disseminate findings to a broader audience, contributing to the larger discourse.

C. Follow-Up

Step 9: Identifying and addressing implementation gaps – Evaluate the challenges encountered during implementation and make necessary adjustments. Incorporate feedback to enhance the tool, the overall process, and the final report.

Step 10: Tracking commitments and driving action – Conduct regular follow-ups to encourage duty bearers and stakeholders to act on the findings. Continue to engage youth throughout the process.

Role of Youth in the Budget Analysis and Tracking Tool

In the ***preparation*** phase, youth contribute to the design of the tool, participate in consultations, and receive training in data collection and analysis.

During the ***implementation*** phase, they often take the lead in collecting data, generating insights, and developing actionable recommendations. Additionally, it is important to review the budget with them.

In the ***advocacy*** phase, youth spearhead campaigns and represent their communities in dialogues with decision-makers, amplifying the voices of underserved groups.

As part of the ***follow-up*** phase, they are consulted to identify gaps, address challenges, and suggest improvements, ensuring the process remains adaptive and grounded in community realities.

By meaningfully involving youth, the process builds their capacity as informed advocates and fosters long-term civic engagement in education budgeting.

Engaging Decision-Makers and Other Stakeholders

The insights generated through budget analysis and tracking can significantly influence decision-makers and cultivate broader stakeholder support. These evidence-based findings can enhance education advocacy efforts in several ways:

Present at public forums and consultations – Share insights at budget forums, stakeholder roundtables, and consultation meetings to inform public discourse, highlight community priorities, and advocate for targeted reforms. In Pakistan, the Reframing Education Accountability in Pakistan (REAP) project promoted a participatory institutional arrangement between District Education Authorities and Civil Society Education Networks (CSENs), enabling education managers to formally engage CSEN members in the district-level budgeting process. This collaboration has helped ensure that budget proposals are grounded in local realities and responsive to the actual needs of communities.

Utilize visual storytelling and infographics – Transform data into infographics and effective visuals to develop alternative education budgets or proposals for new budget allocations that more effectively address local needs.

Engage youth in high-level advocacy – Empower youth-led presentations at cabinet meetings, public hearings, or parliamentary sessions to amplify community voices and enhance the credibility of the advocacy narrative.

Promote transparency and accountability – Share reports with on-the-ground insights using creative and engaging formats, such as infographics, to engage duty bearers, including policymakers, in multi-stakeholder forums. This approach encourages transparency, fosters accountability, and advocates for the institutionalization of youth participation in budgeting processes.

Effective Strategies for Facilitating Budget Analysis and Tracking Tool

Recognize the political nature of budgets: Budgets are not merely technical documents; they reflect political choices influenced by power dynamics and electoral interests. Understanding this enables CSOs to engage with communities and other stakeholders more strategically.

Engage at the appropriate time in the budget cycle: Timing is essential. Intervening at critical stages of the budget cycle and maintaining pressure over time enhances the likelihood of influencing outcomes.

Utilize consistent, evidence-based advocacy: Regular engagement supported by credible evidence obtained through community involvement can gradually shift government priorities.

Leverage media for accountability: Media engagement can amplify community voices and hold decision-makers accountable to the public. In the context of the REAP project, CSENs partnered with local journalists, equipping them with data and tools to report more accurately on education service delivery. This collaboration enabled communities, particularly those from marginalized and remote areas, to raise their concerns through credible media platforms. As a result, critical education issues gained visibility, creating constructive pressure on district education authorities to take timely and meaningful action.

Empower youth as advocates: Involving and training young people fosters a future generation that is informed, engaged, and equipped to advocate for financial justice in education.

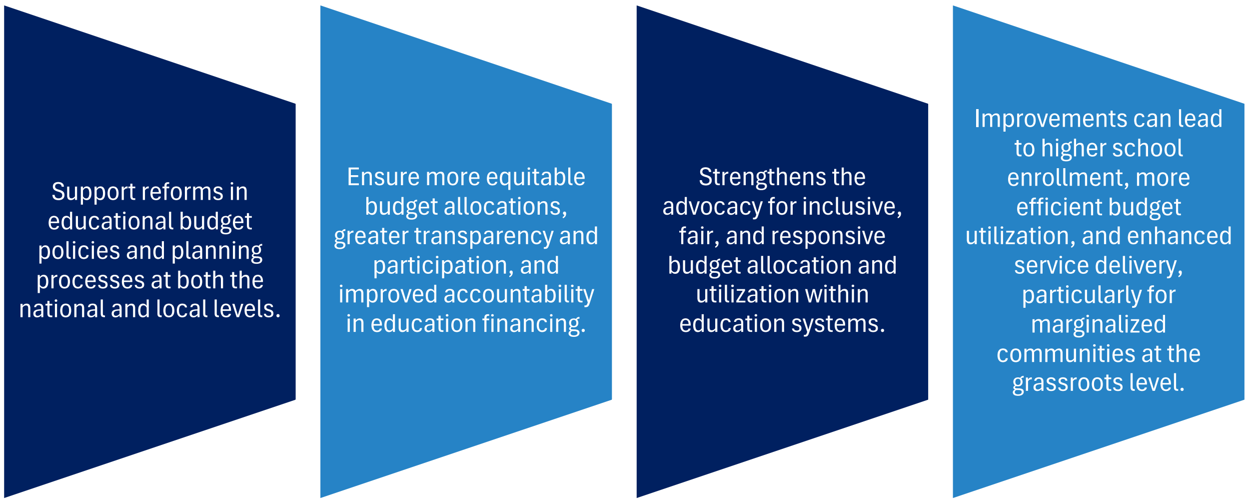

Figure 9: Impacts of a Successful Budget Analysis and Tracking

Challenges to Facilitate Budget Analysis and Tracking

Limited data availability and accessibility: Access to relevant and timely budget data may be restricted. To address this issue, stakeholders can utilize the Right to Information (RTI) Act and proactively engage with government officials to promote data transparency.

Low budget literacy: Many communities and local officials may lack the skills necessary to interpret budget documents. This challenge can be mitigated through targeted training programs designed to enhance budget literacy.

Technical complexity of education budgets: Education budgets are often highly technical and difficult to understand. It is essential to simplify and translate budget documents into accessible language and formats to ensure broader comprehension.

Lack of sustainable education funding and conflicts of interest: Unstable education funding and conflicts of interest make it difficult to track budget allocations and spending accurately, undermining transparency and accountability. These structural issues can be addressed by implementing accountability frameworks, such as the **Abidjan Principles**[9], and by fostering long-term partnerships that empower youth and civil society actors to advocate for change.

[9] The Abidjan Principles are a reference point for governments, educators and education providers when debating the respective roles and duties of states and private actors in education. On 13 February 2019, the *Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education* were adopted in Côte d'Ivoire, following a three-year participatory consultation and drafting process.

Government resistance: Resistance or indifference toward community participation may emerge from government actors. Establishing strategic alliances with the media and large networked organizations can enhance public visibility, build political pressure, and incentivize government engagement for increased participation and data-sharing.

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Organizing Policy Dialogues[10]

Overview

The top-down approach to development has provided little space for citizen participation in the development process. Over time, there has been a growing recognition that a state-led model alone cannot achieve the desired development goals of participation, equity, and justice. The involvement of all stakeholders is essential to strengthening policies and broader development efforts. One of the most effective ways to facilitate this is by organizing stakeholder policy dialogues or consultations (Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue, PRIA, 2004).

Policy dialogue refers to a formal (and sometimes informal) discussion that can be organized as a workshop, consultation, or forum with key stakeholders on a specific policy issue (Training Package for Policy Dialogue, World Health Organization, 2022).

It serves as a platform to mediate interactions among stakeholders in a constructive manner, giving voice and space to groups such as young people to engage directly with a range of significant stakeholders, including duty bearers, education authorities, and policymakers. Dialogue is about collaboratively discussing issues and identifying areas of agreement (EQUIP2 State-of-the-Art Knowledge in Education, Policy Dialogue, USAID, EQUIP2, 2011).

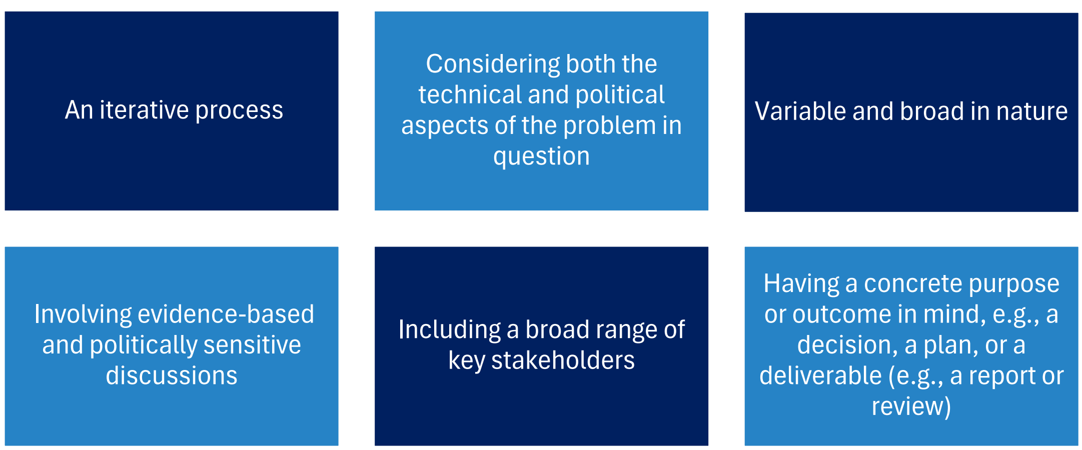

Figure 10: Key Characteristics of a Policy Dialogue
Source: Briefing Note, Policy Dialogue, WHO, et. al., 2015

Whether led by CSOs or driven by government initiatives, policy dialogues and forums help mobilize collective action and apply pressure on policymakers. By structuring both *"invited"* and *"created"* spaces, these platforms ensure that youth voices are included in the policy process. *Invited spaces* are initiated by institutions, such as

[10] Used by all EOL-grantee organizations

government-led consultations, while *created spaces* are driven by civil society actors to contribute to policymaking. Organizing national-level policy dialogues and forums is essential for youth-led advocacy and accountability, as it allows young people to:

For example, in Bangladesh, the Policy Breakfast hosted by IID illustrates how such forums can create space for constructive engagement. These platforms not only empower youth but also provide policymakers with direct insights into their needs, contributing to more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable policy development.

Figure 11: Key Issues for Discussion in Policy Dialogues

Steps for Organizing Policy Dialogues

A. Preparatory Stage

Step 1: Set the objectives and expected outcomes – Clearly define what the dialogue aims to achieve and the changes it seeks to influence. The selection of the main theme should be guided by the key issues to be addressed, requiring active engagement with youth, local communities, and other stakeholders. Objectives, guiding questions, and discussion topics should be formulated based on the intended outcomes, the relevance of stakeholders, and specific contextual needs. For example, IID in Bangladesh organizes "Policy Breakfasts" using a consultative, evidence-informed process to determine each session's objectives. An Advisory Group, comprising policy experts, academics, and civil society leaders, sets the theme and motion based on national priorities and emerging grassroots challenges. Following heightened discourse on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, IID hosted a Policy Breakfast titled "Bangladesh's Readiness for the Age of AI", ensuring the topic was both timely and actionable.

Step 2: Selection of participants – Identifying and mapping stakeholders is a critical step. Stakeholders include individuals, groups, or institutions likely to be affected by or able to influence the issue. Key stakeholders may include government representatives, technical staff, youth networks, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the media. Understanding their roles, interests, and levels of influence helps design a more effective and inclusive dialogue.

The IID conducts detailed stakeholder mapping to identify key actors across government, CSOs, INGOs, academia, media, and the private sector. The snowball method is often used to expand outreach, particularly in underrepresented sectors. Youth participants are selected through an open call for applications, shared widely via the Youth for Policy (YfP) network and other youth-led platforms. Applicants are assessed based on thematic relevance, demonstrated engagement, and potential for policy advocacy. Gender balance is ensured among both youth participants and invited policymakers, facilitators, and experts.

Step 3: Design the dialogue format – The structure of the dialogue should be planned in detail, considering the participants, the issue at hand, and the overall goal of the dialogue. This includes outlining the structure and flow of the dialogue, defining the roles of various participants, determining the duration, identifying logistical requirements, and detailing the process to be followed. It should also encompass the content and materials to be used, the selection of the convener and their role, and the purpose of pre-dialogue consultations. Decide on the format of the event, whether it will include panel discussions, breakout groups, or interactive/digital tools such as 'Mentimeter' and 'live polling'.

Step 4: Plan logistics – Arrange for the venue, travel, food, IT, accessibility, interpretation (if needed), and virtual participation (in case of a hybrid or online format). The choice of venue is crucial to ensure equitable participation among all relevant stakeholders. Ensure that copies of all key resource materials and stationery are organized and stored in one place for easy access and retrieval when needed.

Step 5: Develop a draft follow-up system – While designing a monitoring, evaluation, or learning system, consider including indicators or variables such as those outlined in the EQUIP2 State-of-the-Art Knowledge in Education, Policy Dialogue (2011):

- Tracking policy outcomes, including improvements in education quality, access, and equity.
- Monitoring government actions, such as budget allocations, implementation of regulations, and public statements on the issue.

- Documenting the development or revision of laws, written policies, or regulations resulting from the dialogue.
- Measuring progress through key stages of policy formation, from issue acknowledgment to agreements.

Step 6: Conduct consultations and capacity-building sessions with young people and community representatives – Spend adequate time with young people to clarify the purpose of their participation and the objectives of the dialogue. These sessions help demystify the dialogue process and its goals. They also provide an opportunity to clarify expectations and establish clear terms of engagement. Engage with youth and community members to identify and prioritize key policy issues and refine dialogue objectives. Build the capacity of youth participants in areas such as advocacy, public speaking, and negotiation. Facilitate pre-dialogue sessions to align on shared priorities and key messages.

Step 7: Engage key stakeholders in advance – Reach out to decision-makers and other key stakeholders early. Share discussion points in advance to help them understand what to expect and what will be required of them, ensuring more meaningful and prepared participation.

B. Implementation Stage

Step 8: Facilitate the dialogue – Implementation refers to the actual dialogue event. It is important to engage a skilled facilitator to ensure the dialogue is conducted effectively. Ensure that all key points are discussed and that clear, actionable steps are identified. Position youth not as passive observers but as active contributors.

Step 9: Ensure Documentation – It is always effective to assign the responsibility of documenting the proceedings in detail to a designated documenter. This person should be solely responsible for recording all discussions and processes, including opportunities to enhance the dialogue process and outline follow-up actions. A synthesized document should be created to capture key insights and outcomes.

Step 10: Establish a follow-up system – Agree on mechanisms for monitoring progress, including identifying indicators and ensuring accountability. Prepare a plan of action, define the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, and make decisions on future steps.

C. Follow-up

Step 12: Document and share outcomes – Complete the documentation process and produce materials for wider dissemination and sharing. Depending on the purpose of the dialogue, these documents can help build support for a specific theme or action plan and serve as tools for further advocacy and accountability.

Step 13: Follow Up with youth and key stakeholders (decision makers) – Follow up with youth and other key stakeholders to discuss next steps and determine how the inputs and discussions from the dialogue can be effectively translated into action. Foster intergenerational exchange by pairing youth voices with seasoned policymakers and practitioners, enabling mutual learning.

Effective Strategies for Stakeholder Engagement in Policy Dialogues

Insights from policy dialogues and forums highlight several effective strategies for engaging decision-makers and other key stakeholders such as government bodies, school authorities and association, civil society organizations, policy makers, media and advocacy groups, etc. The following guidelines summarize best practices.

Frame clear and detailed asks – Develop well-articulated policy briefs that clearly outline demands and recommendations. This ensures clarity when presenting to decision-makers and increases the likelihood of influencing policy outcomes. Before finalizing the agenda, consult education stakeholders and community members to ground the discussions in practical realities.

Leverage strategic relationships – Engage influential allies, including public figures and senior government officials, to amplify your advocacy. Additionally, involve "second liners," the technical staff responsible for drafting policy documents and budgets, whose understanding and support are critical for behind-the-scenes influence.

Engage the media responsibly – Use the media strategically to increase visibility, build public support, and create pressure for change. Media coverage can legitimize the dialogue and draw attention from stakeholders. However, it must be managed carefully to prevent the spread of misinformation.

Use formal channels for invitations – Extend formal invitations through legislative or official routes to reach key decision-makers. Maintain consistent follow-up to ensure their participation.

Utilize informal networks – Build relationships with technical staff and bureaucrats through informal channels.

Form strategic partnerships – Collaborate with credible organizations that can expand your reach and enhance your capacity to host large-scale events or consultations. Engage key national bodies like the Ministry or Department of Education early, as timely coordination with such institutions improves alignment and outcomes.

Mobilize government champions – Identify and engage internal government champions or allies who can advocate for your cause within policymaking spaces. Their support can help advance your agenda.

Plan dialogues around stakeholder availability and policy timelines – Schedule dialogues to align with the availability of decision-makers and key policy cycles, such as budget sessions, legislative calendars, or international observance days. Leverage institutionalized spaces like public hearings or government committees to enhance legitimacy. Choose accessible or strategically located venues and offer logistical support (e.g., travel and accommodation) to encourage active participation.

Ensure inclusive youth participation – Create safe and inclusive spaces that enable meaningful participation from young people, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. Provide technical and logistical support and invest in sustained capacity-building to empower youth who may lack confidence or experience in influencing policy.

Challenges to Organize Effective Policy Dialogue

Convening policy dialogues often face several challenges. A few such challenges are discussed below.

Lack of action beyond dialogue – Securing the participation of essential stakeholders can be challenging. Even when they do attend, translating dialogue into concrete commitments remains a significant hurdle. To ensure that the post-dialogue phase achieves its objectives, it is essential to develop a clear evaluation plan. This plan should serve a dual purpose:

- Demonstrate that multi-stakeholder dialogue is an effective forum for engaging diverse actors on a specific theme.
- Establish the dialogue's contribution to the organization's overall goals.

Resource constraints – Inadequate financial resources can limit the scope, scale, and sustainability of policy dialogue efforts, restricting stakeholder participation, reducing the frequency of engagements (including follow-up activities), and compromising the quality of discussions.

Misinformation and disinformation – The spread of false or misleading information through media channels can erode trust and derail constructive conversations.

Weak follow-up – Following up on commitments made during dialogues is often inconsistent or delayed. Sustained momentum and accountability require regular follow-up at multiple levels. Building in follow-up mechanisms ensures continued pressure and progress.

Exclusion of young people – Young people face barriers such as lack of confidence, technical skills, or logistical support, which can limit their meaningful participation. It is critical to ensure youth engagement goes beyond mere tokenism.

Language and communication barriers – The use of technical jargon or unfamiliar local dialects can exclude participants and hinder understanding. Facilitators play a crucial role in ensuring all voices are heard and clearly understood.

Impacts of Policy Dialogues

Inclusive spaces for community participation and influence – Effectively convened policy dialogues and forums have led to significant changes by creating meaningful spaces for community participation at multiple levels, ensuring that local voices are represented in national conversations. These platforms have informed decision-makers through policy proposals and data generated from ongoing monitoring, thus influencing the direction of educational reforms.

Building accountability and co-creation – The dialogues also serve as key mechanisms for securing commitments from stakeholders, fostering a culture of accountability. Importantly, these dialogues promote collaborative problem-solving, transforming the educational issues raised by participants into opportunities for co-creating solutions between rights holders and duty bearers.

Youth empowerment and leadership – Youth are increasingly recognized as active participants in the policy process, contributing to a shift toward more inclusive and youth-responsive education systems. These forums have empowered young people by equipping them with skills, confidence, and leadership competencies, positioning them as future changemakers in the education sector.

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Organizing Digital Campaigns[11]

Overview

Advocacy has long centered on the voices of individuals and communities seeking to influence decision-makers and spotlight social, political, or environmental issues. Traditionally, this involved town hall meetings, persuasive speeches, editorials, lobbying, and organizing marches. While these methods were impactful, they often faced limitations related to geography and media access, making them slow to enact change.

The advent of the digital age revolutionized advocacy, giving rise to what we now know as digital advocacy and campaigns. Although the fundamental goal of mobilizing support and influencing policy remains unchanged, the methods have become more immediate and dynamic. Digital advocacy utilizes online technologies and platforms to advance causes, gather supporters, and shape public opinion. As Mary Joyce (2010) observed, it represents "the new mechanics of change," enabling campaigns to spread rapidly across regions through hashtags, memes, and stories. For example, in the Dominican Republic, EDUCA (Business Action for Education) launched the digital campaign *"Better Teachers, Better Citizens, Better Country!"*[12] using videos, social media, and petitions to spotlight teacher quality and accountability. The campaign ignited national debate and shaped the agenda for education reform.

This transition has made advocacy more accessible, especially for those historically marginalized from traditional platforms. As digital advocacy gained momentum, scholars and practitioners began to explore its implications for social movements. Important questions arose: What does mass mobilization without in-person meetings mean for activism? How do digital tools alter the speed and style of engagement in social change? Research has increasingly focused on how these dynamics impact civic participation and policy reform.

Purpose of Digital Campaign

Digital campaigns are often misunderstood as merely a means of creating awareness or visibility. For youth-led advocacy and social accountability, they encompass much more than just viral posts or trending hashtags. When strategically designed and grounded in community concerns, digital campaigns become multi-dimensional tools for transforming conversations, influencing decision-makers, and building collective power. Table 5 presents six core functions that a youth-led digital campaign can serve, with each role providing a distinct form of impact and engagement.

Table 5: Core Functions of a Youth-Led Digital Campaign

Function	What It Does
1. Raise Awareness	At the most basic level, digital campaigns can inform people about their rights, available services, ongoing policy debates, and existing gaps in implementation. For many,

[11] Digital campaigns are being used by Karkhana Samuha (Nepal) and E-Net Philippines as effective tools to disseminate awareness and knowledge, while also amplifying youth voices and positioning them at the forefront of education and advocacy efforts.
[12] EDUCA leveraged videos, social media, and a Change.org petition in a digital campaign spotlighting teacher quality and accountability. It sparked a national debate and shaped the agenda for education reform

	especially in rural or remote communities, digital content serves as the first touchpoint to learn about the existence of a service or that a right is being denied.
2. Amplify Voices	Digital platforms can provide visibility to lived experiences that are often absent from mainstream media or policy reports. By sharing personal stories—whether through short videos, interviews, or testimonials—youth-led campaigns can make abstract issues tangible.
3. Mobilize Support	Effective digital campaigns turn awareness into action. By fostering solidarity and creating online communities, they enable people to engage actively by signing petitions, participating in discussion forums, or attending community events.
4. Pressurize Powerholders	Digital advocacy becomes most impactful when it creates public pressure on those in positions of power. Whether it involves tagging policymakers on social media, organizing email campaigns (such as online petitions), or mobilizing citizens to comment on draft policies, these actions can enforce accountability.
5. Build Cross-regional Networks	Digital platforms enable youth in various regions or even different provinces to connect, collaborate, and identify shared struggles. This broadens the campaign's reach and enhances its legitimacy.
6. Complement Offline Action	Perhaps the most important role of a digital campaign is to amplify what is happening on the ground. When digital and offline advocacy align, the impact is stronger, more visible, and longer lasting.

Box 4: Kalambad – An example of a youth-led digital campaign

Kalambag ("Kalampag at Ambag ng Kabataan") is a Facebook Live program created during the COVID-19 pandemic to respond to the growing demand from children and youth for a space where their voices could be heard and their energies productively channeled. Spearheaded by E-Net Philippines in partnership with the Department of Education Kidapawan Division – Youth Formation Office, LAPIS Seesaw Channel, and various schools and CSOs, Kalambag runs every other Saturday from 1–2 PM.

The name blends two Filipino words: kalampag (to make noise, create an impact) and ambag (to contribute or do one's fair share). Each one-hour sessions are conducted via video conferencing and streamed live on the Kalambag FB page and cross-posted to multiple partner pages, featuring candid conversations among youth on issues affecting their communities. Kalambag has become a dynamic digital avenue for the marginalized, excluded, and vulnerable sectors (MEVS) to voice concerns, share stories, and inspire collective action. It amplifies youth perspectives, encourages civic engagement, and channels their "noise" into meaningful contributions toward education reform and societal change.

Steps to Design a Youth-Led Digital Campaign

Step 1: Identify the Problem and Vision of the Campaign

To determine what you want to campaign for, you will need to explore a problem or issue that affects you or young people in your community. It can also be an issue that you care about the most.

Table 6: Questions to Define Your Campaign Goal

Prompt	Notes
What issue are you addressing?	
Why is this issue important to your community?	

What do you want to *change* or *achieve* through this campaign?	
What is your **main call to action**? Your vision should be clear and inspirational – try to describe in one sentence the long-term change you want to see from your campaign. Think of this as the heart of your campaign – everything you do should help you make your vision come to life.	

Having a vision is only the first step! Now that you have identified the issue that matters most to you, it is time to do some research to better understand what needs to be done and how.

Step 2: Getting Started with Impactful Research

Reflect on your initial encounter with the issue: Consider the context in which you first became aware of it, whether through news outlets, online platforms, educational institutions, or professional environments.

Re-examine the original source: Return to the initial point of discovery, as this may provide pathways to additional relevant sources or individuals.

Investigate supplementary reading materials: If your awareness originated in an academic or workplace setting, seek recommendations from educators or colleagues regarding relevant books, articles, or reports related to the subject.

Utilize available resources: Conduct comprehensive online searches using a variety of sources, including academic journals, news articles, blogs, and opinion pieces.

Begin collecting evidence: Pursue case studies or examples of individuals who have been impacted by or engaged in addressing the issue, as these will strengthen the narrative of your campaign.

At this point, pause and reflect on the problem identified, then consider how to achieve the vision and who can help accomplish it. Follow the prompts in the table below to help organize your thoughts.

Table 7: Questions to Define the Solution and Target for the Campaign

Prompt	Your Answer
What are the major issues that led to the problem?	
What is the effect of those issues in the community?	
What are the key issues the campaign will focus on?	
What are the steps to solve those issues through the campaign?	
Who is your target audience for the Campaign?	

Keep the objective of the campaign specific, measurable, and achievable, keeping in mind how it aligns or helps you actualize your vision.

Step 3: Power and Stakeholder Analysis: Influencers, Supporters and, Story Shapers

Now that you have gathered all the necessary information, from the problem to the proposed course of action, it is time to evaluate and identify the key individuals who can assist with your issue—these are the 'decision-makers.' These individuals are the ones whose perspectives you need to shift or influence to realize your vision. At this stage, you will utilize stakeholder analysis and power analysis to assess which decision-makers you should involve or influence to effect meaningful change.

Table 8: Know Your Audience

Group	Who are they?	Why do they matter?	How will you reach them?
Primary Audience			
Secondary Audience			
Tertiary Audience			

Now that you have made a list of target audiences and influencers, think carefully about them:

- Who are they?
- Do they support your issue or are they against it?
- What else do they care about?
- Who can help you reach them? Who do they listen to?
- What do you need them to do?
- How can you convince them to do it?

Remember, you cannot reach everyone, so you will need to decide on two or three targets whom you think you could influence.

Step 4: Implementation of the Campaign

Create a concept note highlighting the key messages that will drive the campaign. Remember to adjust the message based on the target audience and choose the mode of delivery and platform carefully. It is also important to engage in actionable activities on the ground, as this helps build the momentum of the online campaign.

Table 9: Questions to Help Build the Core of the Campaign

Steps	Tasks	Guiding Questions	Notes
Step 1	**Build Your Core Message**	1. What is the problem? 2. What evidence do you have? (facts, stories, stats) 3. Why does this issue matter? 4. What changes do you want to see? 5. Who are you speaking to?	
Step 2	**Tailor Message to Target Audiences**	Identify 2–3 key targets (For example, elected representative, school principal, media). For each target: 1. What do they care about? 2. How does the issue connect to them? 3. What action do you want from them?	
Step 3	**Test Your Message**	Share your message with friends, peers, or mentors: 1. Are the facts clear, and correct? 2. Does the message make sense? 3. Is it persuasive? Write down any feedback received.	

Once it is decided what the campaign stands for, the content can be designed accordingly. Some ways to populate it offline and online are presented in the table below.

Table 10: Examples of Engaging to Achieve the Vision of the Campaign

Action	Youth Role	Keynote
Peer engagement	Active Youth Groups, WhatsApp networks, and local clubs	Encourage informal sharing—memes, stories, challenges
Content creation	Creating videos, reels, zines, testimonials, and posters, photo message	Mix local (lived experiences) with global (SDGs, policy gaps), keep the content simpler and granular in regional language.
Hashtags and tagging	Co-create campaign-specific hashtags and tag policymakers	For example, #Education4All, #MeToo
Direct outreach	Youth DM, email, or comment on the official pages of local leaders	Prepare scripts or templates to support them
Influencer collaboration	Youth find local champions—teachers, artists, micro-creators	Offer them small briefs to co-share content

Step 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

It can take time for you to start seeing results, so monitoring your campaign will help you gather evidence about whether changes are occurring and how they might be bringing you closer to your vision. Evaluating your campaign at the end will help you determine what worked, what needs to change, and remind you to celebrate your successes! Ask the following questions:

1. What did you want to happen?
2. What actually happened?
3. What worked?
4. How do we know (evidence)?
5. What did not work?
6. What can you change next time?
7. What don't you know?
8. How can you find out?

At this stage these questions can be addressed by involving youth in:

- Conducting mini-polls or story quizzes
- Leading reflection journaling on how their digital content is evolving
- Hosting review circles (weekly/biweekly) with facilitators
- Recording short vlogs on learnings and emotions during the campaign

Step 6: Course Correction

Table 11: Role of Youth in Monitoring and Correcting the Course

Action	Youth Role	Keynote
Monitor analytics	Youth track what is working via Instagram Insights, YouTube Studio, or Twitter Analytics	Have weekly reflection circles to review metrics
Refine formats	Youth suggest edits to tone, design, or platform timing based on audience behavior	Empower youth to lead mid-course adjustments
Pivot quickly	Youth flag viral opportunities or context shifts (e.g., news events)	Stay nimble—react with authenticity, not just trends

Through this ongoing loop of reflection and action, new strategies often emerge. Sometimes, feedback from the field or a viral post may prompt a shift in visuals or messaging. Other times, it may nudge the campaign in an entirely new direction, redefining its scope, timeline, or even vision. This adaptability is a strength, not a disruption. It shows that the campaign is listening, learning, and evolving with its community.

Ultimately, youth-led MEL is not just about tracking progress; it is about making the campaign smarter, stronger, and more meaningful every step of the way.

Table 12: Possible Challenges and How to Tackle Them

Challenge	Description	Youth-led Strategy
Censorship	Certain hashtags are blocked or flagged	Use alternative spellings or embed in images
Digital divide	Not everyone has smartphones or internet	Pair online with wall posters, peer-to-peer outreach
Platform fatigue	Algorithms suppress content or reduce reach	Diversify formats—stories, lives, carousels
Low digital literacy	Complex content is hard to grasp	Use simple, visual-led, regional language content
Misinformation	Risk of spreading unverified facts	Verify the information from multiple portals, if possible, reach out to the specific department/ person for the actual facts.
Burnout	Young creators feel overworked or unseen	Build safe spaces for check-ins and credit sharing

Impact of Digital Campaigns

Civic literacy: Participation in campaigns enables young people to see themselves as active citizens rather than mere observers. This involvement inspires them to question existing paradigms and actively contribute to meaningful change within their communities.

For example, Karkhana Samuha uses its social media presence by launching RTI Awareness Campaigns, sharing simple infographics and brief, engaging videos that guide citizens through the process of submitting a Right to Information (RTI) request, emphasizing their legal entitlements, and showcase real success stories where RTI has resulted in positive outcomes. In addition, they could post Education Policy Bytes, short, visually appealing updates that simplify intricate education policies, upcoming changes, and practical ways for young people to engage in policy discussions, empowering them to take an active role in shaping the education system. To make their advocacy more relatable, Karkhana Samuha highlights Community Voices & Storytelling by featuring quotes, short clips, or testimonials from students, educators, and parents whose experiences have been influenced by their initiatives, transforming abstract reforms into tangible human stories that motivate action.

Community-level change: By highlighting pressing local issues such as hazardous road conditions and school dropout rates, campaigns elevate these concerns, motivating others to voice their challenges and fostering a unified community response.

Institutional response: As campaigns gain momentum, they have the potential to incite action from government officials and facilitate essential dialogues with public institutions, bridging the gap between youth and policymakers.

For example, In the 2023–24 academic year, Indonesian students kicked off a digital campaign against skyrocketing university tuition fees, utilizing hashtags like #TolakUKT and social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X. Students shared impactful videos highlighting the financial strain from fee increases, created infographics to clarify complicated fee structures, and streamed peaceful protests and negotiations live. The hashtag #TolakUKT gained national traction on Twitter, amassing millions of views and prompting mainstream media coverage. This digital activism compelled the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to halt further tuition increases in 2024 and commit to reviewing the university fee system. This youth-led movement is often recognized for its significant influence on higher education policy in Indonesia. By harnessing social media, the #TolakUKT campaign built considerable public pressure and solidarity, ultimately leading the government to withdraw the controversial fee hike proposal. UKT, or Uang Kuliah Tunggal, refers to the unified tuition fee system in Indonesia's state universities.

Structural shifts: Some campaigns can yield significant outcomes, including the incorporation of youth perspectives in policy consultations and the establishment of new platforms for grievance redressal, promoting inclusivity in governance.

Validation matters: Even small gestures, such as formal acknowledgment of a campaign by government offices, can significantly uplift morale among youth and encourage their deeper engagement in civic activities.

One of the impressive examples that is inclusive of all the above points and effectively channels change and messaging is the campaign *The Alphabet of Illiteracy*[13], launched by Project Literacy (convened by Pearson), which uses a powerful ABC-style video to illustrate how illiteracy underlies global crises like child marriage, gender inequality, and radicalization by portraying real consequences tied to each letter of the alphabet. Debuting at the British Parliament, the campaign aimed to raise awareness and drive action, including gathering signatures for a petition to be presented to the UN on International Literacy Day.

Table 13: Checklist for Youth Involvement in Every Stage

Stage	Action to Ensure Youth Ownership
Design	Set up a youth campaign board or circle
Messaging	Co-create language guides with youth vernacular
Platforms	Let the youth decide where to post and when
Outreach	Youth ambassadors or "change influencers" drive engagement
Monitoring	Create youth MEL champions or “impact narrators”
Learning	Facilitate post-campaign reflection café or vlog series

Works Cited and Further Readings

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[13] *The Alphabet of Illiteracy campaign by Project Literacy used an ABC-style video to show how illiteracy fuels global challenges like child marriage and inequality, raising awareness and mobilizing action at the UN level (TheirWorld)*