INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, something in civil society has shifted. Street protests and online campaigns have mobilised creativity and captured imaginations, made headlines and set the agenda. Movements for climate action, racial justice and gender equity have changed perceptions and viewpoints at incredible speed. Mass mobilisations have challenged and sometimes changed governments.

Many of the movements behind this change have been powered by a new generation of young activists, many of them teenagers and children, who have grown increasingly frustrated with the institutions, rules and values bequeathed by preceding generations. Often mobilising for the first time, young activists have reinvigorated older social movements by giving them a large-scale street presence and bringing in new ways of organising. Young activists have also created their own structures of participation, embracing creative tactics and using new technologies. They practise intersectionality in their everyday organising, with young women increasingly taking leading roles and people from excluded groups asserting the value of their worldviews.

They are the new face of civil society and they are pushing civil society’s boundaries, challenging assumptions about what civil society is, what it looks like and how it works.

The backlash they are experiencing is proof of their efficacy. They are shaking the system, and the guardians of the system – state and non-state forces alike – are responding in the form of threats to their physical, emotional and digital security.
This report summarises the findings of a 10-month participatory research project commissioned by CIVICUS and our **Youth Action Team** and carried out by an intergenerational team of 14 researchers, 11 of them aged between 18 and 30.

Our research pursued three major aims. First, to improve understanding of the global state of youth-driven activism, its agendas, discourses, organisation models, mobilisation tactics and ways of operating, focusing on how they differ from other forms of organising. Second, to give more visibility to the work youth activists do, their victories and the challenges they face. And third, to contribute to the growing body of evidence of the impact of youth activism.

Building upon previous desk research that identified key trends, our research sought to highlight an understudied segment of youth activism: that of youth-led informal groups and activists from the global south, with particular attention on non-English speakers. To document experiences, spark dialogue and incentivise further collaboration, the research was designed as a listening exercise.

This report draws from interviews conducted in 12 languages with 103 activists from 55 youth-led groups across 25 countries. These groups work in a variety of areas – the most popular being education, youth leadership and human rights – and are of all sizes, with 44 per cent having under 50 active members and 25 per cent counting 500 or more. Most – around 56 per cent – are registered organisations, but over 65 per cent describe themselves as having a decentralised leadership structure and 78 per cent report a heavy reliance on volunteer support. Throughout this report, we refer to them all as civil society groups, a term encompassing all forms of groupings, from small, informal local groups that identify as movements, networks or collectives, to bigger formal organisations active at the national or international level.

This report sheds light on the factors influencing young people’s entry into activism, the tactics and tools they are using to generate impact, the challenges they face and the ways in which they tackle those challenges, and the lessons they – and we all – are learning along the way.

This report ends with a set of questions that surfaced during the research process in the hope that they can help prompt debate on effective ways to support youth activists and youth-led groups – ensuring that the support provided is what’s needed and comes in the form, at the times and in the places where it’s needed – without unduly influencing their priorities and agendas.

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1. Groups are considered youth-led if leadership and decision-making positions are predominantly held by people under 30. For the purposes of this research, participating groups were asked whether they self-identified as ‘youth-led’ when, having been established by people under 30, they are currently led by people over 30, often including founding members.

2. Leadership structure, dependence on volunteer support and registration status are used as proxy indicators for assessing formality, with the assumption that less-formal groups have a greater dependency on volunteers, are less likely to be registered and are more likely to operate under a decentralised leadership structure.
That ‘the personal is political’ could very well be the motto of the numerous young activists who invoke a personal experience of pain, outrage or discomfort as a motivation to establish a group to connect with others facing similar problems and work together to address their root causes.

For a member of the International Center for Peace Psychology, the motivation to start a group working on psychology, conflict and peacebuilding came from experience of life in a conflict zone. Entering social change work was, as the interviewee puts it, a way of ‘turning pain into passion’. The same interviewee highlights the continuity between activism and daily life in their context: ‘What you [CIVICUS] think of as activism is just daily survival [for us]’.

A founder of LUCHA, a youth-led organisation promoting youth civic participation and human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), similarly explains that ‘LUCHA was born out of outrage’. The group’s full name in French is ‘Lutte pour le changement’ (Struggle for Change), but inspired by the Spanish Revolution, they choose to identify with the Spanish word for ‘struggle’. Its founders wanted to show people that change is possible.

For the founder of the Taiwanese group With Red & Period Museum, the country’s first civil society group tackling period poverty, puzzlement was the origin of her journey as a ‘menstrual activist’, which led her to question deeper underlying gender issues:

I’ve been a menstrual activist since I first started menstruating. I started out as a solo activist. I was driven by curiosity as to why everybody dislikes menstruation so much that we are not willing to talk about it.

Sometimes action is catalysed by the realisation that situations that are presented as the ‘natural’ and unchangeable state of affairs are not really so. An activist from Bangladesh, for instance, explains that inspiration and motivation came from the realisation that in other parts of the world women and girls had rights and opportunities they are denied in Bangladesh:

Our women and girls have few opportunities to go out and do something because superstitious and overly conservative religious men think women are for housework only … By seeing the lifestyles of women and girls in other communities around the world, we were inspired and motivated to do something for our women and girls with the hope that they could also achieve success.
An activist from Mali remembers first coming up with the idea of starting a group about a decade ago, aged 14, on realising that:

Young girls my age were not going to school and were unable leave their houses as they liked. They wanted to continue their education but were afraid of what the jihadists might do.

For those joining an existing group rather than founding their own, motivations often at least partly involve the feeling of belonging and camaraderie the group offers. This sense of community is also one of the main factors accounting for sustained engagement, along with access to opportunities for learning and leadership. As a member of DAKILA in the Philippines puts it, many things in life change, but the group ‘is always there. It is the constant. It’s a way of life’.

Most research participants focus on what made them enter activism in general, rather than on their choice to engage with youth groups specifically. But a Honduran activist, a member of El Milenio, puts in words a thought that others might share:

I didn’t feel that I had a place to speak my mind before. I tried to join adult conversations but didn’t identify with them.

Another pathway to activism – typical among diaspora movements, but also quite frequent among land rights movements – are family connections with previous generations’ experience of struggle. An inherited responsibility is what – according to members of People of East Turkistan (POET), a Uyghur youth network in Australia – differentiates them from other young people: ‘we are the next generation that will take over and lead’. The experience is similar for a member of Students for a Free Tibet who grew up in Boston, USA, and cannot clearly identify the precise moment that marked their entry into activism, as it was only natural for young children in the community to take part in community events.

In these cases, the distinction between membership in a movement and community membership is not always clear: membership of a community can be synonymous with membership of a movement. As a community-based group in Thailand explained, people who collaborate with the group are not seen as ‘volunteers’ but simply as community members who feel compelled to contribute to group activities. Consistent with this, the ages of this group’s ‘active members’ range from five to 60.
TACTICS
The top three areas participating groups work on are education, youth leadership and human rights. But the impressively wide range of youth activism is revealed by the list of additional issues mentioned. In order of prevalence, these are: peace and security, accountability and democratic governance, women’s and girls’ rights, climate and the environment, livelihoods and jobs, humanitarian emergencies, disability, Indigenous rights, LGBTQI+ rights, migration and displacement, sexual rights and HIV/AIDS, child welfare, digital rights, race issues, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

Many youth-led organisations with significant youth membership do not describe themselves as ‘youth organisations’ because they work on non-youth-specific issues and include members with multiple identities.

Responses to an open-ended question about the focus of activism were often difficult to match with pre-set labels. While useful for donors, development practitioners and academics, including when it comes to organising funding streams, managing projects and defining areas of scholarship, these are less helpful to understand youth-led activism, which tends to be multidimensional and intersectional. This may be the reason why education, youth leadership and human rights were prioritised: rather than discrete issues, these can be viewed as core values guiding the ways groups work.

Faced with an open-ended question about their tactics, the one by far most frequently mentioned is capacity building and training, followed by artivism — the use of creativity and culture to influence change —, networking and coalition building, and cross-movement collaboration. Other tactics used, in order of prevalence, are strategic advocacy, protest and community mobilisation, research and knowledge generation, the promotion of alternative values and ways of living, media collaborations and the innovative use of digital tools. The fact that very few groups mention digital tools as central to their work, counter to abundant research showing an increased reliance on digital tools by activists of all ages, may indicate that among these groups the use of digital tools is now taken for granted to the point that it does not warrant mentioning.

Thematic marches, inter-city walks and clean-up campaigns are examples of mobilisation tactics young activists are using to encourage civic participation and raise public awareness of critical social issues. These large, highly visible events enable them to appeal to a cross-section of society and offer multiple avenues for engagement and opportunities for groups working on different issues to collaborate. In some contexts, however, mass mobilisations tend to be associated with violence, so groups choose alternative methods such as arts-based approaches.
Youth-led groups and movements are exploring ways to produce their own research and knowledge products, often signalling their need for technical support to develop research skills and disseminate findings. Some are independently undertaking studies to gather evidence to strengthen their advocacy and support the work of other activists, while others are forming partnerships with established academic institutions to document and draw attention to the challenges impacting on their communities. Many groups emphasise that local research plays a crucial role in decolonising knowledge and centring the experiences, perspectives and voices of communities.

Young activists working in relatively open civic space, in authoritarian contexts and in conflict-affected societies alike often create platforms for the public, across all age groups, to discuss issues that are important to them. In environments where civic space is highly restricted, they use Facebook groups and publicly available apps such as Clubhouse to facilitate dialogue. Where it is possible to gather in person they host dialogue circles, and in rural and hard-to-reach areas they usually establish physical hubs.

Youth groups also form strategic partnerships with traditional and community-based media to expand their reach and increase the visibility of their activities. Some in Africa and Asia use radio to raise awareness and educate listeners about specific issues. In other contexts, they establish relationships with journalists and media outlets, resulting in more accurate and comprehensive coverage of their work and the issues they advocate for. Groups across all regions use social media and online platforms to share their messages, coordinate participants and circulate calls to action.
The distinction is not always clear between the problems young activists are trying to address and the methods they use to tackle them. Often, the process is the intended outcome.

The International Centre for Peace Psychology, for instance, addresses psychological issues in communities experiencing ongoing conflict through community-based initiatives. It offers safe spaces for the young people participating in their activities to reflect, share, express and take charge of their narratives in the process.

The Basreon Volunteer Team, a movement of young lawyers and other young people fighting for electoral reform in Iraq, incorporates democratic values into everything it does, including its internal operations:

*Our activities are rooted in democratic values. We conduct weekly meetings. We talk, discuss and debate with one another. We work as partners, and every voice counts. We hear each other’s opinions, and we go by majority vote for decisions. [We practise] real democracy, unlike our ruling parties.*

Processes to debate important issues, make strategic decisions and consult the community often represent these groups’ most potent tool, as expressed by a Malian activist and a member of Savoir Vivre in the DRC:

*Our meetings are our principal strategy. We talk about our challenges as a movement, how to mitigate them, and our next steps to help the young people who need us. Every member’s opinion is considered when defining our objectives and activities.*

*Our most effective tactic is active engagement. This is how we implement all our projects. By consulting and including our young participants in the process, we ensure that the activities are relevant to them.*
CAPACITY BUILDING

Given their overwhelming focus on education, most youth groups in our study undertake capacity-building and training initiatives. These have the advantage that they can be implemented with relatively limited resources and through partnerships with established education institutions such as schools and universities. When feasible and aligned with a group’s values and mission, such partnerships help increase the reach and scale of projects. They offer access to young audiences and low-cost facilities, strengthen groups’ visibility and public legitimacy and provide opportunities to influence curriculum choices and priorities.

In Taiwan, With Red & Period Museum collaborates closely with the national education system and other public and private stakeholders. It produces educational content and lesson plans for teachers and facilitates a semester-long course on period equity at National Taiwan University. It also provides specialised training for social workers, policymakers and entrepreneurs.

Greenish, an Egyptian youth-led social enterprise that promotes sustainable development in communities affected by climate change, supports university students pioneering community solutions to environmental challenges using a scaffolded training model – in which content is broken into manageable units, with trainers providing decreasing levels of support as students grasp new concepts and master new skills. The group trains an established university network of Greenish clubs, whose members then replicate the workshops with other university students, after which interested students are invited to further develop their ideas at a boot camp. A selection of participants is then given funding to help implement their ideas.

Examples of collaborations with formal education institutions aimed at introducing new content into existing curricula come from DAKILA in the Philippines and the Tarim Network in the USA. DAKILA brings human rights content into university classrooms through a travelling human rights film festival that takes place every two years. The Tarim Network, a volunteer-run Uyghur youth diaspora network, collaborates with the University of Madison-Wisconsin to strengthen its Uyghur language course offerings and has partnered with Harvard University to launch an anthology of Uyghur literature.

Many groups, however, work outside the formal education system, either because they haven’t found an entry point or because they strategically choose to do so. Among the latter is a youth group working to promote the human rights of young girls in Mali, which
its leader founded when she was 14 years old. This group facilitates training on socially taboo issues of reproductive health, which it intentionally hosts in informal settings to make them accessible to girls who do not attend school. They are able to reach girls in areas controlled by jihadists by engaging local security forces to accompany them. Additionally, the group promotes girls’ education and strategically shares messaging against harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female circumcision through radio broadcasts.

In Myanmar, a group formed following the February 2021 coup manages a community-based school that provides free liberal education and leadership skills training to young people who have opted out of the now military-run state education system. This group, which requested anonymity for security reasons, explained that it also maintains the school as a symbolic form of protest against the military government.

YOUTH ACTIVISM TACTICS

Education Revolution is a youth-led movement that seeks to radically transform the education system in Iraq and other low-income countries across the Arab world. Its founders are young activists and educators who first came together in 2015 to provide informal, after-school classes in critical thinking to school-age children.

When they started, one of the founders recalls:

_We couldn’t rent or get a place to carry out activities, so I turned my bedroom into a classroom. We gathered the kids from the area who didn’t have access to quality schooling and taught them how to discuss, dialogue and form opinions using our own education materials._

They began promoting their activities on social media and grew to include volunteer groups across all 18 provinces in Iraq and multiple Arab countries. They learned by doing, identifying the gaps in the formal education system and developing alternative approaches:

_It was like an experiment. We didn’t have any systematic research on which methods would be most effective with our students, so we learned [from experience] what worked and what could be done differently._

This learning formed the basis of Education Revolution’s advocacy and campaigning. The group calls on governments and schools to increase education funding and replace traditional rote-learning approaches. It holds coordinated nationwide demonstrations and works closely with national media to gain visibility. Through collaboration with similar movements in the region, it conducted a 22-country study aimed at better understanding the state of education in the Arab world and discussing the effectiveness and replicability of its methods.

While the group seeks and obtains permits for specific activities, it remains unregistered and is self-funded through member contributions and donations from supporters.
ARTIVISM AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION

By blending artistic elements with activism, artivism harnesses the power of creative expression to engage emotions, provoke critical thought and inspire action. As an activist from the Philippines put it, art ‘is palatable to everyone. It is the easiest way to mobilise people’.

Because it may be viewed as harmless cultural expression, art-based activism may not attract the same kind of scrutiny as other forms of political organising, making it particularly valuable for activists working in restricted civic space.

The reach and influence of arts-based approaches are enhanced when they integrate familiar practices and traditions. By rooting art-based campaigns in popular culture and local traditions, activists are able to appeal to broader audiences, including older generations and those who may not typically engage in political activity.

Numerous groups included in this study use music, poetry, theatre and film to engage their audiences, spark conversations and share messages more effectively. They provide spaces for people to develop their own artistic expression: a group in Latin America, for instance, hosts closed storytelling workshops for participants to express themselves through creative writing. They also reuse and recycle elements from popular culture to reach out to young people with information or engage them in activities.
In 2014, a group of young people in Syria founded Peace Makers, an organisation aimed at building peace through art, celebrating Syrian heritage and empowering young people to play a vital role in peacebuilding. One of its most popular activities is its peacemaking tour, which regularly travels through 11 regions of the country. The tour invokes the energy and imagery of a bazaar, a traditional marketplace that is also a gathering place where social connections are forged and community is strengthened.

The Peace Makers travelling bazaar features training workshops, dialogue spaces and artistic performances. While local restrictions limit the issues that can be addressed, the group works to make it a place of non-violence where participants can relax and connect with each other. Led by 20 core members, the group now boasts a volunteer membership of 700 and has been able to continue to operate despite significant civic space restrictions.

In South Sudan, Anataban (‘I’m tired’ in Arabic) uses art to mobilise young people around peace and reconciliation. The organisation started as a campaign: in 2016, a group of 20 artists produced and shared a song to express their frustration with the country’s conflict and send out a call to action to others equally frustrated and seeking change. This sparked a movement that evolved into a registered civil society organisation that now has 810 members across nine chapters in South Sudan and refugee communities in the region. In 2017 it launched the Hagana (‘It is ours’) Festival, attracting over 5,000 young people from diverse ethnic communities. Over the years the festival grew, reaching 14,000 attendees in 2019.

Anataban has used this appeal to address other critical social issues. In 2020 it launched ‘Stop Corona’, a creative campaign urging people to observe government preventative regulations against COVID-19 and offering a platform for them to make suggestions on how to curb its spread. To promote a culture of public dialogue, Anataban hosts weekly poetry open-mic sessions, building on the local tradition of spreading invocations through music and poetry.
The three founders of Taiwan’s Against the Wind Theatre formed the group in 2015, when they were 18. All three had had encounters with the justice system and wanted to help other young people potentially facing a similar situation to rekindle their passion for life and learning and avoid slipping into risky behaviours.

The group uses theatre to bring young people together to co-create something they can be proud of. Through this co-creation process, young people build confidence and employable skills. Most importantly, they form a sense of belonging and purpose. A key to its success is the cultivation of a ‘Zhong er’ mentality – a reference to adolescents’ unique patterns of thought and behaviour – which they repurpose to build confidence, prompting young people to view their youth, ambition and rebellious spirit as ‘superpowers’ that can help them achieve their goals.

DAKILA: Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism was founded 18 years ago by a group of artists who wanted to address the problem of political apathy in the Philippines. During what one of its founding members describes as their ‘rock and roll years’, DAKILA functioned as a loose network. It organised music gigs, poetry readings and other public events to bring people together and spark interest in critical social topics and civic engagement. According to an activist, ‘its success was due to it being a new way of carrying out advocacy and raising awareness with young people’.

The popularity of the artists helped it gain traction, and DAKILA is now a registered member-driven organisation known for its human rights advocacy and campaigning. One of its most successful events is the human rights film festival, which started as a small travelling film festival and grew through strategic partnerships with universities, becoming the main human rights festival in the Philippines. It is held in the metro area of the capital, Manila, and includes satellite festivals in cities across the country’s regions. In the year prior to the pandemic, it reached around 80,000 people.
El Milenio (The Millennium) is a Honduran youth-run media platform that provides young people with a space to discuss socio-political issues. Initially launched as an informal blog, it grew into a mixed-media platform that publishes opinion and news articles, hosts a podcast and coordinates social media campaigns and in-person events.

El Milenio engages young people who wouldn’t normally have much interest in politics because its content is ‘digital, fun and youthful’. Its media campaigns incorporate trends popular among young people to effectively deliver their messages. ‘We make social media campaigns that are accessible and interesting for young people. We adapt our content to our audience. To go viral, we use pictures of celebrities, hop in on trends and use TikTok viral sounds’, explains the group’s director. ‘When my parents saw us posting data on youth participation in elections next to pictures of Bad Bunny and looked super confused, I knew we were sending our message the right way’.

In the lead-up to presidential elections in 2021, the group created ‘Emil’, a WhatsApp bot that provided fact-checked information about candidates, including their areas of work, party affiliations, professional and academic backgrounds and campaign proposals.

Drishti is an unregistered queer collective managed by a core group of 15 young people. Based in the Upper Assam region of India, it aims to build community, solidarity and awareness of critical social issues, mainly related to gender and sexuality.

Drishti has organised public campaigns and Pride marches, but is most proud of its library initiative. In India, libraries have historically been used as a political tool to promote dominant state narratives. But Drishti has reclaimed this cultural space for the community, opening two libraries that welcome community members, particularly children, together and freely exchange ideas.

The libraries double as art spaces and learning centres where volunteers provide informal workshops on gender, identity and other socially relevant topics. Each library is also equipped to provide temporary housing for community members in need, including young LGBTQI+ people.
NETWORKING AND COALITION BUILDING

Networking enables the exchange of ideas, strategies and best practices. It fosters collaboration and synergies. Coalitions enhance the strength and impact of social movements, allowing them to advocate for their causes more effectively, build broader public support and exert pressure on policymakers and institutions to bring about change.

The young activists provided examples of how they form connections and alliances at local, regional and international levels. Some of these exchanges were initiated by them, while others were directly or indirectly facilitated by international organisations or allies. Regional networks appear to be most common in regions where there is a shared language, such as Arabic, French or Spanish.

A LATIN AMERICAN NETWORK

AGloJoven (Global Alliance of Young Politicians) is a recently formed Latin American network of young politicians committed to increasing youth participation in politics. Its founding members met at the first Global Encounter of Young Politicians in Bogotá, Colombia, in January 2020. It first included activists from Colombia and Mexico, and then expanded to Bolivia, Guatemala and Venezuela. The formation of the network, explains one of its founders, ‘was organic. It started by sharing and understanding our common needs’.

AGloJoven functions through regional hubs in the five countries. Each has autonomy to register locally, receive funding and organise activities aligned with the shared goal to promote and defend human rights, democracy and a peacebuilding agenda. Those unable to register locally can channel funding proposals through the other offices.

This decentralised model allows hubs to exchange and benefit from each other’s experiences and resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Venezuelan hub organised a week-long speaker series to motivate public dialogue on issues such as drugs and equal marriage. Thanks to the work of the other hubs to bring in speakers – including councillors and members of Congress – from across Latin America, one of AGloJoven founders observed, ‘we delivered an important message to young people – you can be true to yourself and succeed in politics’. Around 150 people participated.
CROSS-MOVEMENT COLLABORATION

Cross-movement collaboration, beyond national boundaries and across racial, ethnic, class and sexual divides, has been shown to foster a much-needed comprehensive and intersectional approach to social change. As interviewees express, the benefits include the exchange of knowledge and good practices and the cultivation of networks of emotional support and solidarity.

The Milk Tea Alliance offers a strong example of collaboration among youth-led movements. A relatively well-documented transnational youth-led movement, the Milk Tea Alliance is an online pro-democracy solidarity movement led by activists who mostly come from Hong Kong, Myanmar, Taiwan and Thailand. A loose transnational network of young people who see themselves as engaged in similar struggles against authoritarianism, it first emerged on social media but has since led to real-world action and solidarity demonstrations across borders. Its activists became known for sharing tips on how to organise leaderless rallies and stay safe during mass mobilisations. The movement has been assessed as having the potential to shape the way ‘citizens from the region forge a collective prodemocracy consciousness’.

Cross-movement collaboration is taking place among youth-led groups and between these and intergenerational movements both within and across borders. In Indonesia, feminists are forming alliances across different identities to draw attention to women’s rights issues such as gender-based violence, unequal pay and child marriage. An Indonesian feminist network that took part in this study is part of a coalition of civil society groups that organises the annual Women’s March – which, since its founding in 2017, has inspired others in the region. The event attracts active support and participation from multiple excluded groups, including LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous groups, female factory workers, migrant workers and rural communities. This, according to the organisers, reflects the intersectional nature of Indonesia’s feminist movement.
Cross-movement collaboration appears to be particularly common among diaspora groups. Two cases among the groups involved in this research stand out: those of Students for a Free Tibet, a global chapter-based network bringing young people together in solidarity with the Tibetan people, and the Uyghur diaspora youth group POET.

Founded in 1994, Students for a Free Tibet is known for its action camps, which provide week-long intensive training sessions in skills and strategies of nonviolent action and grassroots organising. Camps used to target current and future leaders of the movement for Tibet’s independence, but recently became open to others, and specifically ‘Hong Kongers, Uyghurs and allies that share their vision of collective liberation’. The first cross-movement action camp was held in Europe in early 2023, with a second planned for later in the year, open to climate, Indigenous and racial justice movements such as Black Lives Matter. According to the group’s campaigns director, this decision came from the recognition of the camp’s potential to support allies and the value of cross-movement collaboration:

Different movements have different strengths. For example, Uyghurs have had many successes with advocacy; people can go to them to help with advocacy at the United Nations. Other movements come to the Tibetan movement for strategic campaigning. Cross-movement alliance-building offers us the opportunities to learn from our mistakes, contribute to others’ success and work together for our collective liberation.

A member of POET also describes recent exchanges the group has had with ‘communities facing similar struggles’, including Indigenous, Palestinian and Hong Kong groups. This comes with a personal process of learning and understanding:

Growing up I always thought that only Uyghur people were oppressed. It is enlightening to see that other people have had similar experiences. We can educate one another. First Nations communities have experienced generations of trauma. They are still going through it now.
CHALLENGES
Young activists organising and mobilising for climate action, peace, democracy, inclusion and freedoms can find numerous obstacles standing in their way. Many of these – such as limited networks and access to resources – are shared with older activists, although they often present deeper challenges for young people. Some, however, are specific to young activists, as they are directly linked to their young age and perceived lack of experience, maturity or knowledge.

Most of these challenges could only be properly addressed through coordinated efforts and systems-level change. But aware that life continues while systemic change drags on, young activists are coming up with creative responses to the challenges they face.

**RESOURCING**

A large majority of participating groups highlight limited access to funding as one of the main factors negatively impacting on their ability to operate and scale up the impact of their work. Newly established groups, groups of activists not fluent in a global language and those with limited access to international networks struggle the most to identify and connect with potential donors.

These findings align with earlier research by CIVICUS’s Youth Action Team on the resourcing of youth-led movements. A mapping by the civil society support organisation Rhize of hundreds of civil society organisations in six global north countries also finds that existing funding structures make it difficult for youth-led organisations to access resources and penalise groups that adopt innovative approaches. Our findings show that this is particularly true for youth-led groups in the global south and for those operating in contexts of conflict and displacement.

As repeatedly pointed out by research participants, many funders, whether government agencies, foundations or private donors, choose to work only with formal, registered groups offering legal backing and clear structures of authority and accountability. In Honduras, a member of the non-registered group El Milenio explains that in five years the group was able to secure just one micro seed grant, as a result of which ‘our impact is lower and we often must pay for things like ads out of our own pockets’.
Young people often have trouble registering their organisations, either because doing so is a complex process or because it requires paying costly fees and using professional services they have no access to. The Honduran activist explains that they were new at this and ‘we didn’t know how to register in compliance with the law. We didn’t have legal guidance on how to register’.

Some choose not to register due to security concerns. Such are the reasons invoked by a member of Uquira in Venezuela, who explains that registration involves requirements ‘such as having a physical space and providing a physical address, which exposes you to security issues’. The organisation remains unregistered because it prefers not to register locally and has no access to ‘international registration options’.

In the DRC, LUCHA remains unregistered too, because it is the kind of organisation that, under existing restrictive legislation, the government would consider a threat to national security. As a result, explains a member, ‘if we registered, we would risk our existence because it would give the government the power to intervene in our operations’.

Others, refugee-led groups among them, may not be eligible to register locally or, as a refugee activist located in Bangladesh describes, would have to navigate an incomprehensible bureaucracy to do so. A Thailand-based activist of Burma Support details the options:

We could register in Myanmar, but […] we would have to register with the military government, which […] has issued a warrant for our organisation, forcing us to flee to Thailand. We cannot register in Thailand, as we are undocumented. We are considering registering in a third country, such as the USA, UK or Australia. This would allow us to expand our projects and increase our impact.

Even groups that are registered, have connections with donor networks and have received grants can struggle with grant conditions, including short project timelines, excessive reporting requirements and limitations on what funds can be used for. In this regard, some note that funding typically cannot be used to cover operational costs. Others mention that many donors don’t provide financial support to political movements. This is a problem for groups tackling sensitive political topics, such as those advocating for monarchy reform in Thailand.

To circumvent this limitation, a youth-led movement in Southeast Asia formed a foundation through which it submits funding applications, and now operates as two parallel groups: a foundation and a movement.
Both registered and unregistered youth-led groups are exploring ways to minimise their reliance on scarce international funding. Some are turning towards social business models, developing independent income sources. For instance, those with in-house technical skills are seeking paid consultancy contracts to develop communications campaigns, organise events or undertake research.

Others have acquired physical assets. A community-based group in Thailand, for example, bought trucks that they use to transport community members to protests and rent them out when not using them.

Several groups have entered relationships with private partners that can provide in-kind support and more flexible funding. The Panamanian Association of Debate has an agreement with the food chain Subway, which provides catering for its activities in the capital. It is seeking similar sponsorships for its regional chapters, as providing food to participants is one of its most significant expenses. Others have resorted to crowdfunding to cover expenses that funding agencies typically don’t cover. In Thailand, activists needed funds to bail out numerous young activists arrested under article 112 of the Criminal Code, also known as the lèse majesté law. Their campaign asked people to donate 112 Thai baht (approx. US$3) and raised millions.

A youth-led group in the Philippines maintains a network that engages young people from across all the country’s major island communities. To ease the administrative burden of its members and make up for their lack of access to funding, it has taken on the network’s financial and administrative work, including grant management, allowing them to continue to remain unregistered and function informally.
SUSTAINABILITY

As a result of lack of consistent sources of context-appropriate funding, most activist groups depend heavily on volunteer work. More than half of groups interviewed describe themselves as ‘completely’ reliant on volunteer support, and more than 20 per cent say they are ‘very’ dependent on it. Those without any reliance on volunteers are notable exceptions. While some groups have found creative ways to sustain volunteer support and minimise the need for paid staff, many struggle to sustain their work.

A member of Venezuela's Voto Joven adds some practical considerations that have led the group to look for ‘alternatives to unpaid volunteering’:

Young people need their time to be economically sustainable. But not all donors understand the need to pay volunteers, even though it is essential to sustainability. Volunteer turnover is very high, and whenever someone leaves, we lose knowledge and end up having to do the same work all over again.

These two opposing views are found among informal groups and established ones alike.

CONTROVERSIES AROUND VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteerism is controversial among youth-led groups. Many view it as essential not only to their operations but also to their organisational values and culture, as a member of El Milenio explains:

We believe the credibility of the movement is enhanced by volunteering. Our organisation is very accommodating and flexible, based on the understanding that the work is voluntary. We are open with each other about how much time we can dedicate, and we don’t ask people to commit to more than they can. This is the culture of millennials. It is not a duty to participate, it is what we want to do. It is more than a duty – it is a conviction.

Others, however, are strongly against endorsing unpaid work and therefore seek to minimise their reliance on volunteers. As a member of ReFuse, a group from Lebanon, puts it,

We have very few volunteers and we do our best to not count on them because we believe everyone should be compensated for their work.

A member of Venezuela’s Voto Joven adds some practical considerations that have led the group to look for ‘alternatives to unpaid volunteering’:

Young people need their time to be economically sustainable. But not all donors understand the need to pay volunteers, even though it is essential to sustainability. Volunteer turnover is very high, and whenever someone leaves, we lose knowledge and end up having to do the same work all over again.
El Milenio in Honduras is a volunteer organisation: it has a core team of up to 20 volunteers who manage day-to-day operations and a network of over 100 volunteers who contribute articles, co-create campaigns and participate in activities. Founding members and former volunteers participate through an advisory group but are not considered active members: to sustain engagement, the group has implemented a strict policy of generational renewal that requires those over the age of 26 to hand over to younger activists. This helps prevent burnout and ensures that roles stay in the hands of committed people in a time in their lives when they can dedicate time and energy to them. As a result of this policy, El Milenio can anticipate when key members will transition out, allowing for smooth handovers and greater continuity.

In the DRC, LUCHA is also fully run by volunteers. Despite the considerable risks members face due to their activism, it manages to maintain a large body of supporters by offering multiple forms of engagement that require differing levels of commitment. It has three membership categories: sympathisers, comprising those who believe in LUCHA’s mission and provide financial support but do not engage in its activities; junior activists, or volunteer members who participate in meetings and help carry out activities; and insiders, who have a written agreement and are part of its leadership team. LUCHA sustains volunteer support by matching individual interests with movement needs. Upon joining, volunteers complete an orientation and training process and are asked to identify three out of five available working groups they would like to join. They are assigned to one or two of these based on organisational needs.
SOCIAL NORMS

Dominant social norms, values and practices influence how and to what extent young people engage in activism and work to advance social change. While the nature and dimensions of these cultural barriers differ among groups and regional contexts, a shared challenge is that of overcoming stereotypes linked to age, usually equated to immaturity and inexperience. As expressed by a member of Uquira:

*We are underestimated because we are young. We’ve been doing this for six years, but we’re still considered inexperienced.*

Patriarchal values and gender norms pose additional challenges to young women and become a formidable obstacle for groups working with them in many countries, as an activist in Bangladesh explains:

*Since our women and girls are completely dependent on their male family members, we need to seek consent from their men before approaching them. It’s a huge challenge to explain and convince those men to allow their women or daughters to get involved in our activities. No one has ever done what we are doing, and it’s obviously a challenge to do something for the first time.*

A member of Show Abilities, a Ugandan umbrella organisation for and led by young people with mental, intellectual, sensory and physical disabilities, also notes that people with disabilities must overcome additional barriers that result from prejudice and discrimination:

*Many communities in Uganda associate [certain conditions] with witchcraft, bad omen or even God’s punishment for the bad things done by the parents of affected children. We fight this by creating awareness in the community.*

While parents and other family members can be sources of inspiration and support for young activists, they don’t always approve of their activism. Interviewees shared stories of friends experiencing conflict at home and sometimes being cut off because of their civic engagement. These experiences significantly impact on young people’s morale and continued participation.
Taiwan’s With Red & Period Museum collaborates with faith and cultural leaders to shift popular thinking about menstruation. According to widely held beliefs, people cannot enter religious temples when menstruating. This perpetuates the underlying idea that menstruation makes people ‘unclean’. At temples, people collect amulets, so the group produces and distributes amulets with ‘period positive’ messages – which are endorsed by the highly influential temples.

Chacha Emprende, a Bolivian youth-founded initiative working against gender-based violence and the social stigma that limits women’s access to decision-making, uses a holistic education programme to promote ‘new masculinities’. It holds workshops that give young Indigenous men entrepreneurial training in activities traditionally viewed as ‘female’, such as cooking and crafting. This fosters greater understanding and respect for these lines of work. Guided by an Indigenous elder, participants discuss the chacha-warmi – the male-female duality in the Indigenous Aymara world – and explore the ways ancestral traditions encourage gender equality and respect.
Several groups describe power imbalances within activist communities as a barrier to progress. Uquia, an unregistered, volunteer-led, intersectional feminist network advancing Afro-feminist and queer agendas in Venezuela, is among those struggling to make itself heard amongst the louder voices that dominate the activist community:

*LGBTQI+ activists are mostly men. Leadership is dominated by men; they are the spokespeople, yet they don’t understand the key advocacy points. It is different when women lead.*

While acknowledging that activist work is always hard, the activist emphasises that the fact that they are ‘women, part of the LGBTQI+ community and disruptive’, makes it worse.

Other feminist networks note similar struggles. An intersectional feminist organisation based in Indonesia that requested anonymity says it receives threats from both the government and conservative civil society organisations that view feminism as a western agenda.

Other power imbalances include tension between rural and urban activists, trans and cis-gender activists, groups of different generations, mainstream and disability inclusion activists, and different ideological factions of the same movement. The latter is highlighted by a Thai activist who acknowledges that ‘internal conflicts and lack of trust within the movement has contributed to our failure’.
SECURITY RISKS

Participants note a range of security risks that limit their work. The most commonly referenced are intimidation and disruption of activities, online threats and harassment, and risks to physical integrity. The sources of these risks are diverse and include government agencies and personnel, non-state armed groups, political and religious extremists, state and private media, and conservative elements within the movement.

An activist from Thailand narrates an experience of intimidation by military forces to deactivate a protest movement:

When we first protested against the government’s industrial project, military officials were deployed to control the peaceful protests. Fully armed military personnel also visited my high school to ask about my movements, whereabouts and plans, and intimidate students and staff. Authorities also visited my house to inquire after my mother about the group’s and my activities, called my friends to ask about my whereabouts, and messaged friends on their personal numbers.

Others highlight the risk of arbitrary arrest. A member of Ngwe Oo Guru Lay Myar, a group in Myanmar, mentions that three staff members have been arrested in the past two years. An anonymous activist from the Philippines describes the case of a fellow activist who was arrested while taking part in a creative protest that entailed hanging a banner across a street. This happened on a Friday, seemingly the police’s preferred day for arrests, as it allows them to hold arrested activists over the weekend and delay bail.

Police officers intervened in a training for youth farmers. They requested a permit and the objectives of the programme, personal info, names of mothers, birthdates and addresses of participants, then ended the training. The details collected can be used to fabricate fake drugs charges. We decided to avoid organising activities in these areas to ensure staff are safe.
The digital realm is not safe either. As activism went online, so did threats, intimidation and other rights violations. Several research participants describe online intimidation, harassment and smear campaigns. In the Philippines, these often take the form of ‘red tagging’ – labelling activists as communists – with people ‘warning young people to not get involved in the network, saying that we will corrupt them or get them in trouble’.

As a result, activists may refrain from using digital tools as much as they otherwise would. As a member of Uquira puts it, they may choose to limit the reach of their work to stay safe:

*We don’t show everything we do on social media. We are fine working in the shadows. Digital violence prevents us from publishing everything we do.*

In several contexts, physical harm is a real possibility. This is noted by activists from Mali, where danger stems from jihadists trying to prevent girls attending school, and from Iraq, where it comes from political party leaders and supporters. A member of Basreon Volunteer Team in Iraq recounts:

*In 2020, some of us were shot at, and at their cars. Many of us, including me, had to leave and seek refuge in other cities.*

The threat is even more intense in the DRC, where several LUCHA activists have been killed for their work:

*There’s so much repression and danger. We already lost four of our comrades. They were killed. We do our best to define security parameters and ensure the security of volunteers and activists, but the risks are always here.*

Many activists express concern not only for their own safety but also for their friends and families, and note the need for support to strengthen their and their groups’ capacity to defend themselves against digital and physical threats and acquire hardware to implement improved digital security systems.
MENTAL HEALTH

Balancing the demanding nature of activism with mental health and wellness is a challenge for many. Since most groups involved in this research rely heavily on volunteer support, and many activists receive little or no payment for their contributions and time, they must balance the demands of activism with other demands, including those of paid jobs and family responsibilities. A volunteer with Venezuela’s Civitas Foundation explains:

Civitas does not generate income for me, it takes away from me. Sometimes I get a headache and wonder why I do what I do. But I’m passionate about it and can’t see myself doing anything else.

Activists must also cope with the distress caused by threats to their safety and security and the psychological burden of regular exposure to social injustices, as described by a staff member of the International Center for Peace Psychology:

Working in a conflict zone is like walking on eggshells. Ongoing conflict has people knocking on your door at 3am for help to deal with panic attacks. When people ask for help, you can’t say no. It takes them a lot to come to you due to stigma and other challenges. There’s no sense of breaks for professionals like myself. Doing the work impacts your own wellbeing, and often you can’t even talk about your work openly for your own safety.

On the basis of the understanding of the complex relationship between activism and mental health, some groups have undertaken strategies to establish ‘a community of care and wellness’, as a member of DAKILA puts it. For POET, providing such care is a defining feature of the group:

The collective weight of the trauma our community has experienced is difficult to bear. Having this group helps us to deal with difficult situations. When we heard about the factory fires, and the people who died, we were able to help each other deal with the tragic news and act.
Groups across global regions identify colonial practices and attitudes as a challenge, raising the need to decolonise activist spaces. Some view donor requirements as the reflection of colonial attitudes that are particularly harmful when they don’t fit local realities, as stated by a member of Uquira in Venezuela:

You need to have an international account or be registered. These [requirements] do not reflect our realities. [These systems] are colonial tools that we are forced to navigate.

Others decry stereotypes and prejudiced approaches that require activists to conform to a particular idea of what activism should look like and adopt ways of working that don’t necessarily reflect local culture or realities. As an interviewee from Greenish puts it:

There’s a sense of entitlement when international civil society approaches Egypt. They think they’ve figured it out [...] based on what they see in the news. They come in with preconceptions and predetermined agendas and make no attempt to interact with the local context.

A member of Ma’Mara Sakit Village in South Sudan points out that although research by international civil society organisations doesn’t fully reflect their reality, attempts are made to turn that research into ‘best practices’ that they will then have to follow. A member of Students for a Free Tibet highlights that the most powerful campaigns are those based on the information produced by the movement itself. Several groups pose key questions regarding the legitimate sources and validity of knowledge and express a desire to promote local knowledge and strengthen their capacity to produce their own research.
As part of the colonisation of the activist space, numerous research participants bring up the issue of language hierarchies and language barriers. These are identified as a challenge that prevents many groups accessing opportunities for funding and engagement – most of which, as an Indonesian activist puts it, ‘are in the language of the coloniser’. Some languages, including many former colonial languages, maintain a privileged position in the international development sector and in international activist spaces. As a result, speakers of minority languages must work much harder to access the same opportunities, as a member of the Bolivian group Chacha Emprende explains:

> Agencies should avoid technical and formal language, which we on the front lines don’t use. We do not understand it. Even more so when our mother tongue is Aymara, not Spanish.

In Thailand, a community-based network that defends land and collective rights collaborates with local scholars to collect and systematise evidence to feed into advocacy work. One of its members highlights the importance of these partnerships:

> Our activities have been successful because we have access to in-depth data. When authorities or corporations try to discredit us, we can refute their claims with real time-information collected by community members but reviewed and supported by academics.

In partnership with local academics, the network recently conducted a study on regenerative agriculture, in which farmers rotate different types of crops over time, and its relation to air pollution. Now it is looking to expand its academic partnerships:

> We have connections with older academics who we have worked with for decades, but we want to expand to younger-gen academics who may be able to provide a new approach to issues of land rights and collective rights.

After decades of activity in which it chose not to engage with ‘political’ movements, the network recently joined forces with other youth movements pushing for government reform. It did so prompted by its younger members, who view their organisational mission as intrinsically linked to broader political goals.
GROWTH WITH INTEGRITY

Several groups wrestle with the challenge of preserving their integrity as they grow. As informal groups develop, they often face pressure to conform to established institutional formats. Structures can imply leadership, undermining collective decision-making processes and inclusive cultures that first attracted members to the group. Additionally, they can create new administrative burdens and require fundraising efforts, leading to burnout for members.

Ma’Mara Sakit Village is among those that express frustration about these pressures to change their ways of working, along with a determination to maintain their original spirit despite the push towards formalisation:

*We didn’t want to register as an NGO because we wanted to focus on movement-building. But we are often forced to identify either as an NGO or a company, especially by international development partners, international NGOs and donors.*

MANAGING SUCCESS

To manage and secure funding for its growing portfolio of human rights projects, DAKILA established and registered a sister organisation. This allowed it to ensure effective management while staying an activist group that allows its members space to experiment with new ideas. Although the group recognises that maintaining two organisations is a resource-intensive solution, it credits it with allowing for the development of the systems it needed to support its growth while maintaining the creative spark of its beginnings, 18 years ago. The separation of the activist and management structures has also helped DAKILA minimise risk.

*If there is no funding we can always let go of project-based activities. We however will never let go of DAKILA as we have always believed that the community spirit that DAKILA exemplifies is what will always fuel movement building.*
LEARNINGS
Groups that support individual wellbeing and growth are better at sustaining member engagement. This includes providing a sense of community and purpose, respecting members’ time and contributions and offering them opportunities for learning and growth. As one participant explains, ‘No one should go hungry – for opportunity, leadership, breaks or rest. If someone does, they won’t come back. We need to remember that we are all people first’.

Cultivating future leaders within the movement is key for continuity and long-term sustainability. ‘We home grow our leaders’, states one participant. ‘We rarely circulate open calls for applications’. When they come from within the movement, new leaders are fluent in an organisation’s language and familiar with its ways of working, which facilitates the transfer of organisational knowledge. In vulnerable contexts, this also helps maintain trust and a sense of security within the group.

Joint work with other movements towards common goals can increase visibility, reach and impact. Cross-movement collaboration reduces burdens through shared responsibilities, pooled resources and exchanges of experience and expertise. Mutually beneficial, potentially long-term partnerships can also be forged with established civil society organisations, private companies and academic institutions. These can expand reach, strengthen visibility and unlock access to sustainable funding and in-kind resources. Activists often prefer these relationships because they feel treated as partners rather than grantees.

Meaningful participation from members and the broader community has significant benefits. Participation sits at the core of many groups’ values and identities as popular movements. It also brings a more comprehensive understanding of complex social issues, which helps them develop sounder, more inclusive and effective solutions. Those unable to maintain meaningful opportunities for participation over time risk losing members initially attracted by a group’s participatory culture.

1. CULTIVATE AN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE OF WELLNESS AND GROWTH
2. IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP LEADERSHIP
3. FORM COALITIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS
4. CREATE MULTIPLE PATHWAYS FOR ENGAGEMENT
5. ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION
ANNEX 1.
METHODOLOGY
AND PROCESS
This research project used a participatory methodology. Its participants, a majority of whom belong to the group under study, were actively engaged in all stages of the research process, from project design to data collection and analysis. Based on the recognition of the value of participants’ expertise and lived experiences, this approach helped ensure the data gathered was accurate, culturally appropriate and contextually relevant.

Conducted between October 2022 and June 2023, the research was undertaken by a diverse, intergenerational team that included 11 young researchers with lived experience in youth-led activism. It included four phases, as detailed below, followed by data systematisation and analysis.

### PHASE 1.

**DESK REVIEW**

A multilingual literature review sought to validate the findings of the *Youth Trends in Activism and Civic Space Report*, published in August 2022, and further refine the scope of this study. Sources reviewed included academic journals, traditional news media, Facebook pages, podcasts, websites and YouTube channels in nine languages: Arabic, Bahasa Indonesian, Burmese, Chinese, English, Hindi, Kiswahili, Spanish and Thai.

While the review was limited to the languages represented within the team, expanding the literature review beyond documents published in English was an important step towards addressing the language bias of the current body of research. This effort aligned with the priorities outlined in the Youth Trends report, including that of understanding the experiences of young people in diverse contexts.

Informal and multimedia publications were included at the request of the youth research team, who were keen to review information sources popular among young people in their communities. The youth researchers themselves selected the resources to review and prioritised them according to relevance, uniqueness and reliability.
PHASE 2.

RESEARCH DESIGN

After reviewing their chosen materials independently, the youth researchers compared findings in small groups. The team then met to agree on priorities for the data collection phase and outlined the following guiding questions:

- What motivates young people to mobilise?
- What tactics do they use to mobilise, take action and sustain engagement in different contexts?
- What challenges do youth-led groups and activists face, and how do these differ around the world?
- What strategies are they using to successfully navigate those challenges?

Six areas were identified for further exploration:

- The use of digital tools and related risks and challenges
- Intergenerational collaboration
- Protection concerns and risk mitigation
- The impact of historical legacies on contemporary youth-led activism
- Transnational and cross-movement collaboration
- Measuring the impact of activism

A semi-structured interview guide was prepared and reviewed by the research term and CIVICUS’s Youth Action Team.

PHASE 3.

IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

To identify youth-led groups and movements to include in the research, the team used a peer nomination process. In doing this, they prioritised young people’s perception of who among them should be included in the research, and why.

The peer nomination form was published in 11 languages – Arabic, Burmese, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Kiswahili, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Thai – and circulated for six weeks using a snowball approach. The youth research team and other Youth Action Team members initiated the outreach process by forwarding the nomination form to potential referees from their youth activist networks.

The research team purposefully reached out to people deemed able to identify groups the desk review had highlighted as underrepresented in existing research, such as non-English-speaking groups, informal or unregistered groups, groups with no online presence or with limited access to digital tools, activists facing barriers to access traditional forms of participation, including due to disability, conflict or displacement, and those working on issues such as LGBTQI+ rights, disability and inclusion, statelessness and displacement and Indigenous peoples’ rights.

Referees were asked to nominate groups led by young people (aged between 18 and 30) that have had a significant impact on their community and offer a unique perspective on the tactics...
young activists are using to advance their agendas, and who would be interested in sharing their story but have not yet had an opportunity to do so. They then forwarded the form to other potential referees.

As a result, 97 referees from 29 countries submitted 114 nominations. Most referees were from civil society and 72 per cent were under age 30, with 46 identifying as male, 46 as female and five preferring not to say or not responding.

The 114 nominated groups were from 37 countries, with greater representation from regions outside North America and Europe.

Based on a preliminary review of the nominations, the research advisory group, comprised predominantly of adults from youth-serving organisations, was enlisted to address gaps in the sample.

The youth researchers reviewed the nominations in teams of three. Forms submitted in a language other than English were translated but were distributed in a way that ensured that each form could be reviewed in the language it was originally submitted in and, when possible, by a researcher familiar with the nominee’s local context. This helped minimise bias while supporting cross-learning.

Nominations were shortlisted on the basis of the following considerations:

**Relevance.** How closely the nominated group meets these basic criteria: it is led by young people, is informal with a decentralised leadership structure, is run by volunteers and has limited resources, operates in a language other than English, has positively influenced its community and has the potential to bring a better understanding of the tactics used by youth activists.

**Uniqueness.** Does the group have the potential to offer a unique insight into how young people are mobilising?

**Areas of work.** Does the group work in an area that young people are telling us is important to them?

**Representation/Inclusion.** Is this a group that has been left out of mainstream research?

**Balance/Comparative potential.** Does this make the sample more balanced in terms of regional spread, area of work etc.? Does the sample present interesting opportunities for comparison?

**Feasibility.** Does the team have the required capacity (language, time zone etc.) to undertake an interview? If not, can external support be obtained?

**Wow factor.** Is there anything particularly impressive or exciting about the group and its work?
Online and in-person interviews were conducted with 103 people from 55 youth-led groups in 25 countries, 90 per cent of them outside Europe and North America. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents were under the age of 30, and 97 per cent were under 35. Respondents were not asked to identify their gender.

Interviewees were mainly from communities and languages represented in the research team. Interviews were conducted in 12 languages: Arabic, Assamese, Burmese, Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese), English, English sign language, French, Hindi, Luganda, Rohingya, Spanish and Thai. Around a third were conducted in a non-UN language. Groups that spoke languages not spoken by members of the research team (Aymara, Bahasa-Indonesian, Kashmiri, Kurdish and Tagalog, among others) were interviewed in English or another shared language.

To encourage open sharing, interviews were not recorded. Instead, researchers used a template to take notes in their preferred language. Notes were later entered into a form in English, using drop-down menus with pre-set labels to identify themes, patterns and meaningful information.

In-person interviews were conducted whenever possible to ensure the participation of young people from excluded groups, including those with disabilities, restricted mobility and limited access to digital tools.
LIMITATIONS

This research sought to experiment with alternative forms of collecting information in ways that encouraged trust and inclusivity, but it faced a series of limitations.

As a result of its heavy reliance on the youth research team’s networks to identify potential participants, the interviewee sample is biased towards the countries, communities and language groups represented in the team. This means that important language groups and global regions, notably the Caribbean, Central Asia and Oceania, are not covered in the study, leaving its initial ambition of comparatively exploring the challenges faced by youth activists across global regions partially unfulfilled. A follow-up study would benefit from bigger, representative samples and supplementary data collection methods such as surveys.

The team also struggled to connect with organisations of people with disabilities, with one exception in Uganda. Similarly, participants living near Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh were the only refugees in the study.

It also proved difficult to include groups with limited access to the internet and technology. Although in-person interviews were originally planned, unexpected obstacles hindered some youth researchers from meeting groups face to face and online interviews had to be conducted instead.

Efforts to address the underrepresentation of non-English speaking groups in youth-focused research posed challenges to the documentation and analysis process. Interview notes had to be transcribed into English, and details were surely lost in translation. Many follow-ups were required to solve inconsistencies in the notes. Participating groups were also contacted directly to validate quotes and content attributed to them, and a validation workshop was conducted to sense-check findings with participating groups.
ANNEX 2.
FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS
In consultation with research partners, participants and respondents, the research team compiled a list of questions aimed at opening further dialogue.

**POINTS OF ENTRY**
- Where is the boundary between ‘lived experience’ and activism? Is there one? At what point does ‘lived experience’ lead to creating a group to address the root causes of the challenges faced?
- Is it necessary to have ‘social capital’ to start a movement?
- How do a person’s different identities influence the type of activism they embark on?

**TACTICS**
- Is cross-movement collaboration facilitated by the recognition of shared values, identities or challenges despite differences in context? What else motivates cross-movement collaboration?
- What support is needed to facilitate networking and collaboration between groups that do not share a common language?
- How can resources beyond money be explored?

**CHALLENGES**
- How can engagement and volunteer commitment be sustained, especially in the early days of a movement?
- How can large groups make decisions and allocate responsibilities in a participatory way?
- Are there any groups providing free legal aid to help navigate the registration process?
- What strategies can groups implement to protect themselves from serious security risks? Do private digital giants provide activists with free access to digital security tools? How can activists guard against their misuse?
- How can we collaborate better? Why aren’t we collaborating more?
- How can we identify our allies? If institutions support a movement out of self-interest, can they still be considered as allies?

**RESPONSES**
- Are there other examples of attempts to decolonise knowledge that we can learn from?
- How do other youth groups look beyond their traditional audiences to secure partnerships and funding?
- How can we mobilise resources within the youth activist ecosystem to address the challenges addressed in this report?

**RESEARCH**
- What ethical considerations should be taken into account when conducting research involving people under the age of 18?
- How can collaboration and partnerships with academia or civil society enhance impact?
- What methods and tools can be employed to communicate findings more effectively to diverse audiences, including young audiences?
- Why did we face so many challenges in engaging organisations of people with disabilities? How can we ensure that disability issues are effectively integrated into research on civil society, rather than being treated as a separate topic?
The analysis contained in this report would not have been possible without the input and insights of numerous activists who generously contributed their time and expertise and shared their stories. We are grateful to the groups and movements that participated in the interviews that inform this report:

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We are particularly thankful to the activists from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mali, Myanmar, Philippines and Thailand who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons but contributed valuable information and insights about the efforts they continue to make without letting fear get in the way of their dreams.
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